

Productive dilemmas: assistance and struggle in a Nicaraguan
agricultural cooperative

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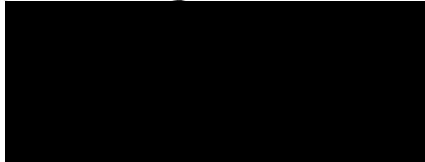
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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

2015

Declaration

I, David Cooper, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.



Abstract

Based on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork, this thesis is an ethnography of Gualiqueme, a village in the northern mountains of Nicaragua which was established by the Sandinistas as an agricultural cooperative in the 1980s. It explores the way rural Nicaraguan understandings of efficacy have informed and inflected their involvements with the cooperative, the Sandinista state, and each other.

For Gualiqueme residents the prospect of productivity and efficacy revolves around a crucial dilemma. On the one hand effective action is viewed as grounded in an embodied personal struggle (*lucha*). On the other, relevant powers are taken to be distant and external, and viable action is understood to be contingent upon cultivating vital relations of assistance; with God and the saints, with the president and politicians, with the powerful outsiders staffing NGOs.

The effort to mediate this duality of assistance and struggle across a range of domains is shown to comprise a central concern for Gualiqueme residents. It runs through the local production of historical knowledge, the negotiation of household relations, through efforts to establish entitlements to land, participation in state and NGO welfare projects, and the differing forms of popular religion.

Developing this argument allows the thesis to present a novel perspective on the distributive politics characteristic of 'New Left' governments in Latin America, going beyond standard models of populism or clientelism. Gualiqueme residents are keen supporters of Daniel Ortega's incumbent administration, and becoming a beneficiary of state welfare projects has come to hold a central place in rural political imaginaries. The thesis shows that understanding the appeal of these 'assistentialist' political forms for Gualiqueme residents requires framing them in relation to the diverse ways in which dilemmas of efficacy are handled in rural Nicaraguan life.

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Acknowledgements

I am enormously grateful to all of the people in Gualiqueme and neighbouring villages who made this research possible. I was continually astonished at the warmth of hospitality I received during my fieldwork. In particular, Esperanza, her husband Erwin and their children Wilber, Maritza and Margarita welcomed my wife and I into their family. I can't thank them enough for their friendship and company, which was a constant source of insight.

Dennis Rodgers and Mark Jamieson were generous in sharing contacts and advice when I was preparing for my first visit to Nicaragua. Camilla Corben also kindly pointed me in the right direction. I'm grateful to the staff at Nitlapan in Managua for giving me access to their facilities. I thank Jose Luis Rocha for his guidance, and Rene Mendoza's generous advice and assistance during the initial stages of fieldwork were a real help. Orlando Nuñez Soto and Javier Pasquier were both generous in their support and were critical to the success of my research arrangements. The staff at CIPRES in Pueblo Nuevo, and in particular Norman and Rolando, went out of their way to ferry my wife and I around a series of potential field locations, and I'm truly grateful for their assistance.

This thesis would probably never have been completed if I hadn't had a good supervisor, and I was extremely lucky to find a fantastic one in Martin Holbraad. His commitment to anthropology has been an ongoing inspiration. In addition to his influence, my work has taken shape in relation to the rich intellectual environment of the anthropology department at UCL. I thank my fellow students and colleagues, particularly those involved in the Cosmology, Writing up, and 'Pizza' seminars over the years. I'm also grateful to Charles Stewart for reading a draft of the thesis and giving helpful suggestions, and to Allen Abramson for his support, and for providing a dazzling example of how to speak ideas. Having excellent administrative staff in the department has also made things a lot easier, and I'm particularly grateful to Paul Carter-Bowman for his efforts.

I'm truly thankful for the support of my parents, which enabled me to make the transition to anthropology in the first place. Though my mother didn't live to see this thesis completed, I'm delighted she was able to visit Gualiqueme on a trip which she relished, and which reminded her of her childhood in the countryside.

Finally, an extraordinarily large amount of thanks are due to my wife, Mali. At least half of the blood, sweat and tears that went into the making of this thesis belong to her, and she has been a wonderful companion throughout.

This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council.

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List of Acronyms and Organisations

ALBA	Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (<i>Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América</i>).
ATC	The Association of Rural Workers (<i>Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo</i>).
CAD	Agricultural Defence Cooperative (<i>Cooperativa Agrícola de Defensa</i>).
CAS	Sandinista Agricultural Cooperative (<i>cooperativa agrícola Sandinista</i>).
CIPRES	Centre for Social Promotion, Research and Rural Development (<i>Centro para la Promoción, la Investigación y el Desarrollo Rural y Social</i>).
EPS	Sandinista Popular Army (<i>Ejército Popular Sandinista</i>).
FSLN	Sandinista National Liberation Front (<i>Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional</i>).
IHNCA	Institute of Nicaraguan and Central American History (<i>Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y Centroamérica</i>).
INRA	Nicaraguan Institute of Agrarian Reform (<i>Instituto Nicaragüense de Reforma Agraria</i>).
NICARED	Pseudonymous non-governmental organisation.
MRS	Sandinista Rennovation Movement political party (<i>Movimiento de Rennovación Sandinista</i>).
NGO	Non-governmental organisation.
PRODECOOP	Second-level cooperative organisation based in Estelí, Nicaragua.
PROOR	Oscar Romero Project (<i>proyecto Oscar Romero</i>), an NGO.
UNAG	National Union of Farmers and Ranchers of Nicaragua (<i>Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos de Nicaragua</i>).
UNO	National Opposition Union political party (<i>Unión Nacional Opositora</i>).

Chapter 1—Introduction

El Mero Jefe

On the morning of 19th July, the anniversary of the day when Sandinista revolutionaries took the capital city in 1979, the bus arrived in the village of Gualiqueme before dawn. President Ortega—the boss himself (*el mero jefe*), as villagers often referred to him—would be giving his annual speech at the Plaza de la Revolución in the afternoon. The plan was to be moving by 4.30am, and villagers intending to make the trip emerged from their houses sleepily, finding their way to their seats in the darkness, gradually filling the bus. As is now traditional, the buses bringing in Sandinista supporters from communities across the country—dozens and dozens of them, each overflowing with passengers—would travel in convoy, stopping periodically to wait for other vehicles arriving along different routes to catch up. Across the country, private transport companies aligned politically with the Sandinistas had taken their regular vehicles out of service—the old US school buses, resprayed with vivid colours and striking patterns, emblazoned with the names of the individual operators—responding to the call from the FSLN to participate in this massive fleet, and to provide a free ride to anyone wishing to travel to the capital. The majority of regular bus routes would be out of service for the day.

We set off from the village not long after 5am, just as the sun was starting to rise. The first wait, for around an hour, was down in the nearby village of Matazano, as a group of buses coming from communities near Yalí caught up. Once the sun had heated slightly, many of the men clambered up to the luggage rack on the roof, passing round bottles of *aguardiente*, the cheap cane liquor that is usually the drink of choice in poor Nicaraguan communities. The procession carried on to Condega, where another short wait allowed dozens more buses to join the convoy. Other revellers, draped with the red and black flags and pink T-shirts of the Sandinistas, but unknown to villagers, jumped on as the bus passed slowly through the town. And so

the slow journey continued, little by little, stopping every hour or so as the convoy gradually amassed. Up on the bus roofs it was noisy now, with whistles, cheers and whoops going up as the bus passed groups of onlookers, watching from doorways or the side of the road. During the periods of waiting, volleys of loud firecrackers would be let off, fired by youths using the home-made mortars that have become a hallmark of Sandinista mobilisations.

It wasn't until around 3pm that the bus arrived at the street towards the outskirts of Managua, where it was able to find a spot to park. 'Daniel' was due to speak at 4pm, and it would be a long walk to the Plaza where the event was to be held. To make the journey back to the village in reasonable time, given the inevitably congested roads, the drivers announced that they would have to leave by 6pm. This didn't leave much time in the Plaza, and some in the bus even decided to simply stay put and await the return journey. But most joined the crowds flowing down the heaving streets towards the Plaza, walking as fast as was possible to try and get to the square in time, passing hundreds of stalls selling food, cold drinks, alcohol, FSLN flags and whistles.

Once we finally arrived, not long after 4pm, the Plaza was already full. Squeezing through the thickening crowd, the group managed to find a spot with a view of the large screens that were projecting an image of the stage across the expansive square. The allotted time for the president's appearance had already passed, but the loudspeakers were still deafeningly playing the FSLN's political campaign songs that had been produced for the recent election. After half an hour or so of waiting and listening to these political anthems, the first lady, Rosario Murillo, took the stage and gave an introductory speech. But the time was already late, and the group I had accompanied knew that if they arrived back at the bus too long after the allotted departure time, it would go without them. Reluctantly, we had to start making our way back, just in time, as we neared the far edge of the Plaza, to glimpse the president on the distant screens as he took the microphone. After another fast

march back to the waiting bus, the journey home began. Although no longer making any stops to wait for the rest of the convoy, the roads were indeed already packed with buses taking people back to every part of the country, and the going was slow. Finally, exhausted, we arrived back in the village at around 2am, just a few hours before those who had remained at home would be rising to start their day.

This thesis is an ethnography of residents of Gualiqueme, a rural community in northern Nicaragua; about their involvements with and understandings of political power, and the relation of these ideas and practices to the assumptions which inform and underpin everyday social life. It is about everyday efforts to gain access to crucial potencies understood to be, at times, distant and only tenuously accessible. As such, the project involves an effort to make comparisons and draw connections across scales and between domains, standing as an examination of themes which encompass both national politics and the intimate arenas of everyday life and local social relations.

A key 'dilemma of efficacy' is identified as at play across prevailing political and social ideologies. In a range of circumstances efficacy, productivity, and the capacity to successfully realise possibilities of various kinds is viewed as being contingent upon properly recruiting and gaining access to potencies and capacities viewed as separate and sometimes distant. And as is all too clear in the case of a president only momentarily glimpsed during the course of a whole-day political pilgrimage, the work of assuring a proper relation with these crucial loci of potency and possibility is not necessarily easy. But alongside these efforts to access distant sources of power, rural Nicaraguans¹ place great emphasis upon generative and

¹ It should be noted that here, and at a number of other times throughout the thesis, I speak as if my account had a broad relevance for 'rural Nicaragua' generally. Any such implication must clearly come accompanied by some substantial caveats. My field community is based in Spanish-speaking, Pacific Nicaragua. The particular history of the Atlantic coast—with its very different colonial and cultural heritage—and its continuing (though diminishing) isolation from Spanish-speaking Nicaragua, means that I assume that my account says very little about rural life in that part of the country. Many

transformative capacities contained within the body and the person, primarily centred upon a capacity to ‘struggle’ (*luchar*). This thesis is about this the ways this immanent capacity plays into the ongoing work of attempting to assure and insure crucial connections and involvements with sometimes evasive centres of distant power, and about the difficulties of doing so.

As a village that was brought into existence by state decree in a time of civil war, the field community has a rather particular—and particularly involved—relationship with the state and the Sandinista party. The initial establishment of agrarian cooperatives was in part explicitly intended to facilitate the creation of ‘client’ communities of political supporters whose loyalty and allegiance might stand as a bulwark against the military incursions of the Contra (cf. Enriquez, 1991, 1997; Jonakin, 1997; Martinez, 1993)² But this political project, it will be seen, intersected with the cultural and social priorities and dynamics of a population with its own perspective on what might be involved in political power, and what might be at stake in relations with the state (cf. Montoya, 2012b). Adequately accounting for the forms of political subjectivity which have emerged out of this ‘conjuncture’ (Sahlins, 1987, pxiv) will be a key aim of the thesis.

The account of efficacy as construed by Gualiqueme residents to be developed here, I hope to make clear, has considerable consequences for a number of

of the specificities and particularities of the field community within Pacific Nicaragua will be made clear over the course of the text. I hope that it will be clear to the reader that though many of the themes discussed have broad relevance, some characteristics of the field site mean that others are somewhat particular. However, for the purposes of readability—i.e., to avoid continually interjecting exceptions and cautionary qualifications—I choose to refer simply to ‘rural Nicaraguans’ and to ‘rural Nicaraguan life’.

² The Contra is the name by which counter-revolutionary forces operating in Nicaragua in the 1980s were widely known in media reportage of the time, and the name is generally employed in scholarship. In Nicaragua the group is frequently known by the term ‘the Resistance’. Only the latter label is accepted by groups representing such units themselves, and, indeed, there are contexts where use of the term ‘the Contra’ is considered somewhat politically incorrect. Throughout the thesis, however, I follow Gualiqueme usage in referring to counter-revolutionary forces interchangeably as either ‘the Resistance’ or the ‘Contra’.

key scholarly debates of relevance to the field community; including the field of peasant studies, evaluations of collective agricultural forms (particularly those instigated by socialist states), and theorisations of forms of political ‘dependency’ in contexts of populism and clientelism. In this introductory chapter, I will first develop my case concerning efficacy in relation to recent insights among ethnographers of Latin America—drawing in particular on the work of Gudeman and Rivera, and Mayblin—before turning to the implications this account of efficacy brings for these fields of debate.

Efficacy, productivity, and struggle

The primary aim of this thesis will be to develop an account of rural Nicaraguan understandings of efficacy and productivity, and to deploy that account in making sense of rural involvements with key elements of the political and historical context of relevance to the field community.³ My main argument will be that a crucial dilemma runs through and inflects local notions of productivity. On the one hand, power and the capacity for authorship are understood to inhere primarily in sources viewed as *distant*, external, at a remove. The possibility of action in the light of such assumptions becomes a corollary of the capacity to tap into, solicit the support of, participate in, or establish forms of mutuality with these distant sources of potency. Action in such framings thus appears contingent upon the prospect of in some way collapsing or overcoming the separation presumed to exist between the actor and the posited source of exterior potency. On the other hand, great emphasis is simultaneously placed upon capacities which are located firmly *within*; primarily within the body with its capacity to labour and sweat, struggle and suffer. Articulated across a range of contexts, efficacy in such formulations is constructed as vitally

³ I draw on Empson’s (2011) exploration of what she terms local theories of efficacy in formulating this research focus.

embodied, and authorship is conversely viewed as an interior capacity grounded in the experienced act of struggle.⁴

It should be made clear at the outset that in referring to productivity and efficacy I aim to grapple with a set of indigenous cultural constructs. What I aim to capture with my analysis is a nexus of stipulations and assumptions prevailing among Gualaqueme residents, explicit and implicit, which pertain to the prospect of productive living; assumed prerequisites of social efficacy, mundane criteria taken to underpin the viability of action in the world. Rather than standing as an authoritative assertion on my part regarding social causality—as is sometimes implied in use of the term ‘agency’, for example—these concepts are deployed here with ethnographic intent; the purpose is to document and evaluate the impact of a set of key understandings which guide my informants in thought and practice; indigenous theories inseparable from the everyday practices they mutually inform and are informed by.

Across the thesis, the argument will be developed that appreciating the mutual entanglement and intersection of the divergent, but intersecting, premises summarised above holds the key to comprehending rural Nicaraguan involvements in a range of social and political phenomena. Attending to this distinctive dilemma of efficacy—and I draw here on the literal sense of ‘dilemma’ as involving dual premises⁵—has crucial consequences for the way we understand rural involvements

⁴ Given this thesis’ interest in theories of action the possibility of employing and interrogating the term ‘agency’ suggested itself. Recent efforts to re-theorise this concept made the prospect an appealing one (cf., eg., Keane, 2006; Laidlaw, 2010; Mahmood, 2011, whose respective explorations of the term work to give ethnographic traction to the concept, teasing it away from the universalist implications of classic theorisations of structure-agency oppositions). However, I decided to eschew an intervention in debates surrounding the concept precisely because agency is so widely deployed within anthropology and beyond—and with such varying connotations between uses—that use of the term seems to invite the possibility of misunderstanding. I thank Jerome Lewis for his precautions in this regard, made in response to an early presentation of these arguments. I will return to consider the implications of my discussion for the concept of agency in the Epilogue.

⁵ “ORIGIN C16: via L. from Gk dilmma, from di- ‘twice’ + Imma ‘premise’” (Stevenson and Waite, 2011)

with key phases of recent political history in Nicaragua; state projects of collectivisation and decollectivisation, the processes understood to comprise neoliberalism, and recent trends towards 'assistentialist' political forms (see also Molyneux, 2008, for discussion of the term 'assistentialism'; cf. Montoya, 2012a) Across a range of pertinent contexts—domestic practicalities and the conjugal negotiations which give rise to the household; land relations and entitlements within the institutional context of the cooperative; involvement in state and NGO projects of social assistance; and engagements with religious forms old and new—the way these opposed stipulations regarding the possibility of productivity play out will be explored.

Each element in this dilemma gives rise to its own problematic. Positing potency as essentially distant opens up the problem of how to establish and maintain mutualities, participations and involvements across distances and separations of different kinds. To act effectively is here taken to require the tentative, tenuous and precarious closure, broaching, or collapse of such separations. These separations might be categorical (for example in the case of gendered social relations), geographical (as in efforts to gain access to or obtain the support of politicians resident in the capital city), cosmological (in the case of the solicitation of Catholic saints), or might involve a combination of such criteria of distance (imagined relations with the president, for instance, arguably broach all three). Viable action involves the coordination and conflation—across such rifts, ruptures, lacunae—of distinct centres of intentionality; the effort to bind into oneself and one's projects the capacities of tenuously-accessible co-actors. This is no easy task, and many of the everyday anxieties and insecurities which inflect social life in rural Nicaragua emerge from the difficulties of achieving these needed incorporations.

Emphasis on forms of potency and capacity rooted within the body, conversely, gives rise to a different set of concerns. Here, attention is focused on exactly what is enabled by bodily capacities, on forms of efficacy grounded in the

potency of bodily struggle. But it is the problematic emerging from the need to negotiate the simultaneous assertion of *both* possibilities—given the extent to which this involves a degree of contradiction and paradox—that stands at the heart of local thinking about efficacy. As will be seen in the chapters to follow, local engagement with a range of social and political contexts can be productively analysed as comprising an effort to mediate the conceptual tensions spilling out of these divergent stipulations.

The work of Gudeman and Rivera (Gudeman, 2012; Gudeman and Rivera, 1990; Gudeman et al., 1989) will be a crucial point of reference for this effort to theorise rural Nicaraguan understandings of productivity. Gudeman and Rivera's work aims to describe the model of domestic economy which prevails among their informants in Colombia and Panama, and they undertake a rigorous ethnographic documentation of ideas and practices pertaining to economic thought among their research subjects. A number of their key observations are worth relating in detail here, as in many ways the argument pursued in this thesis will comprise an effort to extend their insights into a broader domain of political involvement and practice.

Gudeman and Rivera argue that understandings of productivity, labour and the household among rural Colombians are integrally related to the key concept of *fuera*, which they translate at times as 'strength' or 'force' (Gudeman and Rivera, 1990, p18), and most recently as 'vital energy' (Gudeman, 2012). This materially-grounded force is understood to be crucial to humans, to originate with God, and to flow through land, food, and persons in the form of a current; a flow effected by the struggle of labour. This leads to a cyclical set of propositions in which labour, food, everyday household relations and notions of divine power mutually inform and impinge upon each other. *Fuerza* is required in order to have the strength to labour, and the point of labour is to produce the food that allows *fuera* to be regained, since the struggle of work inevitably depletes that store. The ongoing effort of labour is needed in order to bring into the person the vital energy required to animate life, and

conversely the state of animated vitality required for labour is understood as enabled by the house's store of *fuerza* already obtained from past labours. Crucially, this ongoing flow is posited as ultimately originating in and underwritten by the divine will which allows life to exist in the first place, and the struggle required to keep the vital circulation of *fuerza* in motion comes to be framed as an effort to harness the enabling potential of divine intentionality. As the authors put it:

‘In the Colombian model [...] the human uses up force that can be traced to food, then to land, to nature, and finally to God's might. For the rural people, the capacity to work productively is not given in their being; rather, labour signifies force that comes from God.’ (Gudeman and Rivera, 1990, p104)

It should be noted that Gudeman and Rivera are primarily concerned to analyse these ideas as comprising a distinctive economic theory which they term the ‘house’ model, and which they oppose to a ‘corporate’ model. Their analysis works from the assumption that their informants possess and articulate a coherent economic model entirely equivalent to, though distinct from, the economic models formulated by Western economists on the basis of the written traditions of economic thought. Indeed, part of Gudeman and Rivera's study involves a historical argument regarding the lines of intellectual influence running between historical ‘folk’ traditions in Europe, contemporary folk traditions in Latin America (i.e., their research subjects), and the ‘inscribed’ traditions of economic thought that comprise canonical works of theory in the western tradition; including authors such as Marx, Ricardo, Locke and even Aristotle. Gudeman and Rivera consider parallels between aspects of the domestic model they describe and ideas found in canonical Western works as best accounted for by the notion that Western authors have historically deployed and reproduced conceptual frameworks which were rooted in the folk traditions of their own times and places.

But because of this concern to limit their attention to what they take to be an explicit economic model prevailing among their informants, Gudeman and Rivera

delimit their study to practices and discourse pertaining directly to the domestic unit. Reading *Conversations in Colombia* (1990), for example, we get a limited sense that the research subjects happen to be living in Colombia, with its distinctive political history. The ways in which the understandings of productivity, labour, and *fuerza* which the authors describe so well might play into or inflect contemporary political involvements or historical knowledge, in addition to the domestic economic practices they focus on, is left unexplored. The broad account of efficacy pursued in this thesis is intended to build upon Gudeman and Rivera's work by facilitating an expansion of the field of relevant phenomena, in order to grasp how understandings of productivity and possibility run through and mutually entangle domestic involvements, political engagements and religious practices.

It should be noted, briefly, that this widened focus involves an epistemological shift. Gudeman and Rivera consider their research object to be a coherent economic theory, a mental entity explicitly known and consciously articulated among their informants; their methodological approach—consisting primarily of interviews conducted among informants in diverse locations, and involving close interrogation of the meaning of key concepts which structure their informants' responses—is related to and congruent with that assumption.⁶ Their aim is to adequately comprehend and document an intellectual construct operative among their informants. The definition of efficacy employed in this thesis, in contrast, does not presume that the object of study is always an explicit theoretical entity, consciously articulated, and existing 'out there' in the world as a singular and unified conceptual construct. Explicit understandings and theoretical statements will comprise a key focus of the research, but the analysis aims to bring into conversation explicit theories and ideas, and what might be termed the conceptual implications of key practical involvements. I take the synthetic presentation provided here—the

⁶ Described in Chapter 1 of Gudeman and Rivera (1990).

articulation of which comprises a central argument of this thesis—to be a product of my own analysis rather than the documentation of a mental entity putatively discovered in the words, deeds or minds of my informants (cf. Henare, Holbraad and Wastell, 2007; Holbraad, 2012).

While Gudeman and Rivera focus specifically on the domestic unit and the explicit theorisation of *fuerza*, the account of productivity developed here takes into account broader sources of potentiality and possibility that social actors may attempt to gain access to or harness in the course of their daily practice. As will be seen, for my informants, efforts to gain access to the material flows enabled by participation in NGO and state ‘projects’—projects ranging from development efforts and public health interventions to politicised distributions of social assistance—were conceptualised in broadly comparable ways to the kinds of efforts to facilitate the flow of *fuerza* that Gudeman and Rivera describe. Just as notions of the struggle integral to agricultural labour inform understandings of flows of vital energy, so too a comparable sense of the generative potentials of struggle is drawn upon in relation to efforts to become a beneficiary of distributive political forms. If domestic practices are informed by the understanding that facilitating the flow of *fuerza* is vital, a key aim of this investigation will be to comprehend the importance to my informants of comparable efforts to facilitate and participate in material flows which expand beyond the household and reach into the national political arena. I argue that by attending to the particularity of local assumptions pertaining to efficacy, these broader efforts can be comprehended as entanglements of the assumptions regarding domestic productivity described by Gudeman and Rivera on the one hand, with broader political contexts on the other.

Crucial here is the way in which the *struggle* which facilitates the flow of *fuerza* conjoins disparate sources of potential; those framed as internal to the person with those assumed to be remote. Gudeman and Rivera’s account allows us to see how the efforts of agricultural labour enable rural Colombians to envisage their daily

practice as enabled by a vitalising potential originating in a divinity understood to be cosmologically distant. While God may be far away—requiring the intermediary capacities of saints for direct solicitation of his potency to occur—the understanding of *fuerza* as an ‘energy’ that flows between material forms allows this distant potential to be brought within and reconciled with the embodied experience of labour. The struggle of labour is not just about gaining the necessary nourishment of food but rather comes to comprise a mode of infusing the person with the animating principle which makes life possible (1990, p98); ‘work alone is not sufficient, for without human spirit and will nothing would be accomplished (*no lograría nada*), and everything depends upon the might of God and the consumption of His strength contained in the crops.’ Through the mundane and material transfer of *fuerza*, distant power comes to be contained within the person.

In this effort to harness and establish involvements with dispersed sources of potential, great emphasis is placed, then, on the productive properties of *effort* itself. It has already been noted that Gudeman and Rivera observe the extent to which an emphasis on struggle as facilitating and mediating the flow of *fuerza* informs the economic logic they describe. But their account perhaps leaves this idea of struggle underexplored. In his most recent paper on this theme, Gudeman reflects explicitly on the concept (2012, p63):

‘Again and again I heard life described as a “struggle.” I puzzled about the use and meaning of this word for longer than I would have liked. Did it refer to a physical struggle with the environment? Did it mean that the larger economy presented a struggle? Did it mean a competitive struggle with others? Or did it refer to an existential struggle to understand the world? I now think that the term has primarily a material sense. Maintaining the self and the house is a struggle. Even if the elements of life’s energy are given, getting and composing them for use is an unending effort.’

While this conclusion undoubtedly provides us with part of the answer, it seems appropriate to ask what is taken to be achieved by this intense focus on ‘unending effort’ as facilitating the securing of vital strength through material work. In thinking about this question it will be useful to consider the work of Maya Mayblin (2010, 2012, 2013, 2014; Mayblin and Course, 2014), whose research among a community in Northeast Brazil deals with exactly this theme, exploring what is locally taken to be achieved via mobilisations of notions of struggle and suffering. I have already argued that a key requirement of efficacy for rural Nicaraguans consists of the closing of separations such that mutualities with and participations in distinct centres of potential can be established. Mayblin’s work—which resonates strikingly with the concerns of my informants—suggests that we understand this process as taken to be enabled precisely by the generative possibilities attributed to suffering, a capacity situated firmly within the body. Exploration of this theme allows us to develop a perspective on discourses of difficulty among Nicaraguans which goes beyond viewing them primarily as a window onto objective structural disadvantage (as in, e.g., Lancaster, 1992).

Mayblin focuses on the way marriage brings these themes into sharp focus. For her informants, cultivating a productive social life, and particularly the conjugal union which constitutes the core domestic unit, necessarily demands that people involve themselves with a morally-questionable knowledge of the world. Mayblin (2010, p2) examines ‘how narratives of sacrifice are enacted and re-enacted until they come to constitute part of the fabric of the moral person’. A persistent emphasis on struggle and suffering, she argues, plays into a theme of sacrifice which resonates within the Christian tradition, and enables rural Brazilians to expiate their necessary engagement in the morally transgressive requirements of productive life;

‘It would seem that [suffering] offers some way of dealing with the dilemma of having to live productively, yet sinfully, in the world, and hence of re-vivifying one’s failing relationship with God.’ (Mayblin, 2010, p87)

She points out that the literature on folk Catholic traditions spanning Latin America and the Mediterranean has frequently emphasised a discursive and ritual focus on the generative potentials of suffering, but that this has primarily been investigated in certain rather circumscribed contexts; funerary practices, pilgrimages, and votive interactions with saints (2010, Chapter 3). Mayblin argues that it is necessary to explore the way these sacrificial themes spill over into everyday life, informing domestic relations and the performance of mundane labours as much as they infuse delimited ritual contexts.

Such an approach leads her to discuss the extent to which women and men, in distinct ways, aim to construct themselves as 'exemplary' sufferers. While for women such suffering is performed through the recital of narratives which situate their everyday domestic duties as painfully arduous, men are viewed as undertaking comparable acts of struggle in their labour in the fields: 'women tend to frame their narratives through a generalized idiom of suffering, men tend to frame theirs through the more specific idiom of suffering through labour.' (Mayblin, 2010, p105) Mayblin analyses these performances as primarily having to do with expiation and atonement. In relation to both the conjugal domain, and in relation to the requirements to work in order to provide for the family, Northeastern Brazilians understand necessary practices to be unavoidably sinful. By emphasising suffering, Mayblin argues, her informants strive to constitute necessary labours as penance.

Although it doesn't comprise Mayblin's central argument, she also makes clear that struggle and suffering is also understood to facilitate the binding of people into needed social involvements:

'At times, suffering appears to be just as much about exchange with humans as it is about establishing credentials with the divine. Suffering could thus be said to be productive, not only because it elicits reward in the next world, but also because of the productive social relations it gives rise to in the present one.' (2010, p92)

Social relations are *given rise to* in this context, Mayblin surmises, precisely because 'being seen to have suffered constitutes a powerful way of eliciting care and material reward from those one has suffered for.' (p92) Her account makes clear that for women, performances of suffering work to elicit and secure relations of involvement and mutuality with kin, relations which sustain the viability of everyday life. Similarly, the 'burden' upon men to stand as providers, responsive to the claims of their family for support, is constituted as paradigmatically performed via the suffering of labour. To have suffered for someone in the domain of domesticity and the family is taken to compel a response; it elicits vitally needed mutualities.

As will be seen throughout the thesis, residents of rural Nicaragua participate in comparable discursive and performative emphasis of the productive possibilities of suffering, primarily articulated through the notion of 'struggle' (*lucha / luchando*). The perspective on efficacy developed here prompts us to view this accentuation of suffering as a key operator in local stipulations regarding what is required for viable social and political activity. It will be seen—in line with Mayblin's analysis—that struggle is a key modality for affectively bringing others who might otherwise be distant into a circle of influence, mutuality, and reciprocity. This becomes especially salient in the light of concerns, discussed above, regarding distant potencies. It could be stated that the human faculty for suffering and struggle is constructed as a primary means by which capacities situated *within* the person become bound up with those distant potentials whose imbrication is taken to be a condition of productivity, vitality, efficacy and power. In respect of each of the distinct modalities of distance mentioned above (categorical, spatial, cosmological), efforts to broach the gaps that obtain between distributed loci of potency often centre on the productive possibilities attributed to a capacity to struggle.

While Mayblin's account primarily explores the way these stipulations play out in the conjugal domain, this thesis will work to explore the way this set of assumptions has inflected rural Nicaraguans' involvement with key elements of their

recent political and institutional history, in addition to the domain of domesticity. Taking the work of Gudeman and Rivera together with that of Mayblin allows us to synthesise the above concerns as a model of efficacy and productivity which, this thesis will show, has considerable analytical purchase in making sense of the concerns of rural Nicaraguans. Notions of efficacy among my informants revolve around dual premises, as observed above. Our exploration of the work of Gudeman and Rivera, and Mayblin, allows us to view the tensions emerging from these simultaneously-entertained stipulations as finding resolution through notions of *vital flow* facilitated by *generative struggle*. Across the thesis, I will make the case that this model has explanatory purchase in relation to a number of key domains, and the chapters to follow will explore—for example—ways in which the emergence of revolutionary subjectivity, involvements with land within the cooperative, and participation in ‘assistentialist’ (Montoya, 2012a) modes of politics have been grappled with through the creative expansion and redeployment of these central notions of flow and struggle. These possibilities attributed to the notion of struggle, it will be seen, have had significant ramifications among a population for whom the themes of struggle and suffering have been all too resonant. This way of understanding rural Nicaraguan theories of efficacy, it should also be noted, has substantial implications for a number of central scholarly debates of crucial relevance to the field community. The remaining sections of this introduction will explore the theoretical ramifications of this perspective for our understanding of land reform, scenarios of clientelism and the concept of dependency.

I close this section by noting briefly that this analysis of local understandings of efficacy has consequences for the way in which notions of precarity and vulnerability inform the theorisation of rural populations. Running in counterpoint to the central argument of the thesis will be a call to rethink the role of precarity in

our analyses.⁷ Attention to this theme is of crucial importance given the fact that analytical assumptions about the role of precariousness have been central in the scholarly production of knowledge about rural populations. Scott's (1976) classic theory of a 'subsistence ethic' as *the* central priority informing a peasant moral economy was based upon the key proposition that the ecological position of peasants rendered them inherently vulnerable to the fickleness of nature and the unpredictability of crop yields. 'Fear of food shortages' (p2) is taken to be a central ethical operator, propelling a 'safety-first' principle (p5) to the centre of the peasant's social and economic concerns. Social relations such as those of clientelism and *compadrazgo* come to be viewed in this perspective as comprising a strategic effort to shore up a degree of security in the face of inherent ecological vulnerability.

More recent studies—replicating the form of Scott's argument—tend to view insecurity as characteristic of a broad epochal 'neoliberalism' understood in political-economic terms. With the reduction of state social safety nets recommended by the abstract prescriptions (Miller, 1998) of neoliberal policies, subaltern populations are exposed directly to the vagaries of the market. Ethnographic work therefore aims to document the 'livelihood strategies' employed by economically-marginal, and hence vulnerable, populations (Nygren and Myatt-Hirvonen, 2009). In such accounts, precarity—taken to be a broad consequence of 'neoliberal' policies for marginal populations—is comparably posited as a basic background against which social relations necessarily show up as a strategy of security.

In either perspective, 'nature' or 'the market' stands as a fundamental, and inherently insecure background condition, and analysis proceeds by viewing social phenomena as efforts to *respond to* and shore up security in the face of that conditioning threat. To put it succinctly, social relations are remedial to an insecurity

⁷ In doing so, the thesis contributes to emergent debates about the concept of precarity and its analytical value for anthropological theory (cf., e.g., Stewart, 2012; Weston, 2012).

which precedes them. The account presented here, however, brings to the fore various ways in which insecurity is understood by my informants to be an emergent property of those relations stipulated as necessary for social efficacy and productivity. Relations and involvements—spanning the domestic, social, political and cosmological—are crucial for productive living; but relevant insecurities are just as often *consequences* of those needed ties as they are preceding, pre-social motives for establishing such ties in the first place. In exploring this theme, the thesis responds to recent calls to construct ethnographically contextualised accounts of the particularities of security (Holbraad and Pedersen, 2013).

Peasant studies, land reform and the prospect of ‘cooperation’: a cautionary view of the individualism-collectivism binary

Perhaps the most consequential conceptual implication of the account of efficacy developed here emerges from the extent to which it troubles those analyses which depend upon an opposition between individualism and collectivism as the explanatory key to peasant politics. Evaluations founded upon such a binary have been central in both the political history of the field community, and in scholarly theorisations of peasant populations more broadly. Indeed, this section will argue that a close intellectual parallel can be observed between conceptualisations of the peasantry and their historical dynamics within scholarly literature, and those that have been mobilised politically at an elite level in Nicaraguan society (as documented in, e.g., Hodges, 1986; Montoya, 2012b; Zimmermann, 2000). This shared discursive framework—part of a global political culture—revolves around a central opposition between individuals and collectivities. Recent efforts to intervene in rural Nicaraguan society—both ‘socialist’ and ‘neoliberal’—can best be viewed, the literature suggests, as efforts to manipulate a posited historical dynamic of development substantially emerging from this key opposition. Sandinista projects of land reform and collectivisation, and subsequent neo-liberal measures aimed at counter-acting or

undoing these policies and related institutions, stand as opposed interventions working from distinct ethical takes on a view of historical development to a great extent shared.

Scholars have long been clear that Sandinista policies founded upon this conceptual edifice failed to resonate with the political priorities of rural constituents (Baumeister, 1985; Enriquez, 1997; Jonakin, 1997; Moberg, 1983; Saldaña-Portillo, 2003). But evaluations have frequently resorted to the same conceptual binary, assuming that *individualist* peasant producers were alienated by the early collectivism of the FSLN. The pressing urgency of theorising rural political consciousness for the FSLN in the 1980s and before shouldn't of course be underestimated. In line with longstanding debates in peasant studies (cf. Scott, 1976; Wolf, 1973), a central question for the revolutionary organisation had been whether or not peasant populations were capable of insurgent activity; a debate which split the FSLN in the years prior to the 1979 'triumph' (see Walker, 2003). In the 1980s, having taken power, the importance of comprehending and theorising peasant political consciousness for Sandinista policymakers was redoubled by the apparent disaffection of rural populations, a political discontent that appeared to be manifesting itself in the form of support for counter-revolutionary activities (Marti i Puig, 2001; Mendoza Vidaurre, 1990). In each of these phases of political history, characterisations of peasant production as having an affinity with 'individualist' forms of consciousness antithetical to socialist mobilisation and revolutionary commitment were a powerful explanatory resource (cf. Enriquez, 1997, for an evaluation in these terms of 'class consciousness' among agrarian reform beneficiaries). However, though few ethnographic studies have been undertaken among rural communities in Spanish-speaking Nicaragua, those that exist make clear that rural disaffection with collectivising projects cannot be accounted for simply by characterising rural producers as individualists (Montoya, 2003, 2007, 2012b; Müller, 2010). This thesis will contend that adequately accounting for rural involvements

with the various political projects which have impinged upon the countryside over the various phases of recent history in Nicaragua demands that we begin with an appreciation of what is assumed to be required for productive living by rural people themselves.

It will be necessary, then, to explore the consequences of this conceptual binary for understandings of land reform projects and rural involvements with collectivist institutional forms in Latin America. A brief review will first be conducted of key approaches within social anthropology to situations of land reform and collectivisation, much of which has been based on research in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. In that context, scholars have argued that certain *compatibilities* and resonances can be observed between long-standing indigenous social and political perspectives on the one hand, and the imposed structures of socialist collective institutions on the other. Following a comparable mode of analysis in relation to Central America, it might be expected on the basis of assertions within the regional ethnographic tradition that rural people conversely could be expected to be thoroughly *incompatible* with the socialist impetus towards ‘unity’ and collectivism. Certain assertions within the literature will be traced which revolve around the notion that rural Central Americans are ‘individualists’, whose sociality and worldview has far more resonance with the neoliberal political epoch that has been a focus of recently-published studies.

Indeed, many accounts of collectivisation in Nicaragua and Latin America problematically locate the primary locus of analytical attention in an imputed tension between peasants on the one hand, and political or institutional context on the other, with each of these putatively opposed phenomena taken as relatively unitary and coherent entities. Such identifications of tensions and oppositions rely, I suggest, on a variety of ways—drawing on traditions of peasant studies, as well as genealogies of western political theory—of mobilising a conceptual opposition between individuals and collectivities, or individualism and collectivism as political ideologies and

orientations. But this line of analysis is shown up as deeply problematic by many other elements of rural life as richly depicted within the same ethnographic tradition. Indeed, despite the occasional constructions of rural people as being 'individualists', a simultaneous characterisation has been sustained in which folk traditions are conversely understood as exhibiting a kind of primordial compatibility with collectivist politics. These paradoxical characterisations, I suggest, emerge from incautious transpositions between different arenas of thought. While the conceptual opposition between individuals and collectivities or individualism and collectivism has tremendous purchase in accounting for the intellectual genealogies underpinning socialist and neoliberal developmentalist ideologies and related land reform policies, the binary leads to distortion and apparent paradox if elements of rural life are mapped onto it in an effort to draw conclusions about how socialist or neoliberal policy interventions might play out in practice. The argument of this thesis is that attending to the dilemmas of efficacy prevailing among rural populations captures the way political life has been experienced better than any depiction of 'individualist' peasants riling under the impositions of a 'collectivist' government.

Ethnographies of collective and cooperative farms

Early accounts of collective farms by social anthropologists were undertaken by scholars working in the Soviet Union (Bell, 1984; Kideckel, 1993). Such studies were largely guided by a historical framework; operating with the notions of a prior and coherent traditional peasant culture, they understood socialism as an alien political and economic system imposed on rural cultures by a powerful central state. The central question arising from this perspective became to what extent traditional culture had *survived* the socialist imposition, and to what extent collectivisation, conversely, had completely altered rural life. Fel and Hofer's (1969) classic account of the Hungarian peasantry ended with an epilogue describing how the peasant culture reconstructed within the main text had by the time of writing been more or less

destroyed, with key institutions then 'extinct': 'the transition has only been possible at the expense of the traditional way of life' (1969, p383). Later ethnographers, however, came increasingly to identify *continuities*, rather than simply ruptures, across the pre-socialist/socialist epochal divide (cf. West and Raman, 2009). Thus, anthropologists have been interested in how pre-socialist social privilege based on wealth in land was in some cases transposed into influential positions within the new politico-bureaucratic basis of hierarchy (Bell, 1984), and comparably how managers of collective farms have transferred their status into the new spheres of market activity coming after the collapse of communism (Verdery, 1996; Verdery, 1998). Property has of course been a central theme (Hann, 2003; Verdery, 2004; Verdery and Humphrey, 2004), and in identifying continuities across putative epochal divides, anthropologists have come to question stark oppositions between 'individual' and 'collective' organisational modes, asserting that constructing such concepts as mutually exclusive is ideological, rather than an accurate empirical account of social realities (Hann 2003). Other scholars have emphasised broad historical trends which overarch conventional identifications of political epoch, with Lampland, for example, arguing that collectivisation furthered a process of labour commodification already well under way through pre-socialist capitalist development (Lampland, 1995, 2002).

A different perspective has been developed by anthropologists who have viewed socialist and neoliberal political forms from the perspective of cultural comparison. Caroline Humphrey, for example, argues that the experience of rural Buryat people in collective farms can only be understood if the *resonance* between traditional political conceptions and the structures involved in socialist practice is recognised. Local norms of personhood construe individuals as 'social beings right from the start' (Humphrey, 2002, p165), in which selves are always apprehended as being part of a larger socio-political whole. This indigenous way of imagining the person as immersed within a hierarchically-organised patrician, Humphrey suggests,

‘is analogous to, and sometimes even directly mapped onto, the positioning of oneself in collectives on the basis of notional shares of collective resources’ (2002, p166). The overlap is presented as accounting for historical outcomes; despite state efforts to decollectivise, and massive financial difficulties, collective farms have remained in existence ‘because they corresponded in many ways to indigenous and deeply felt concepts of the social unity’ (2002, p169).

Comparable identification of historical resonances and overlaps between socialist forms on the one hand, and rural sociality on the other, is undertaken by David Sneath (2002), also in Mongolia; he suggests that neoliberal reforms have not played out as anticipated by policymakers precisely because of the tremendous *difference* between the assumptions upon which they are based and the ideas about property and social order prevailing among pastoralists. Access to land had traditionally been mediated by interaction with custodial powers, both spirits and terrestrial lords who had allocative power over lands within their respective jurisdictions. Such a scheme resonated with the structures imposed by socialism; ‘In both collective and feudal pastoral economies, common herders were tied members of an administrative district and owed politico-economic obligations to the central authorities of that district’ (2002, p201). But neoliberal assumptions about private ownership, based on ideas about the autonomous individual, do not sit well with these indigenous formulations, he argues, and the economically disastrous outcomes of privatising reforms are read as a consequence of this incompatibility (2002, p196).

Peasants as individualists

These analyses cry out for a view from Latin America given the extent to which scholars have depicted rural people as individualists. Is it the case, then, that while Inner Asians exhibited cultural compatibilities with socialist impositions, Latin Americans are likely to be primordially at odds with collectivist projects? George Foster (1979), for example, argued in his classic ethnography of Tzintzuntzan that in

response to the 'logic of limited good' two responses suggest themselves. One possibility is to try and bury differences and cooperate, 'to as pronounced a degree as communism' (1979, p133). The alternative, he states, is to embrace an 'unbridled individualism', and he argues that his informants have evidently taken the latter course of cultural development. He proceeds to comment that his informants are 'remarkably individualistic [...] every person sees himself in a perpetual and unrelenting struggle with his fellows and the world at large for possession of or control over what he considers to be his share of scarce values' (1979, p134). As a consequence, the prevailing sense is that 'cooperation is a pointless activity', and Foster asserts that people 'see major cooperative efforts as personal threats, and not as devices to improve community life' (1979, p136). Foster is not alone here in assuming that an emphasis on struggle equates to 'individualism'. Commenting on peasant communities in Nicaragua, Marti i Puig observes that a 'perception of one's own strength' is assumed to be 'central to personal progress', and depicts this as indicating a 'strong individualism' (Marti i Puig, 2001, p21). Likewise Greenberg (1989, p209) assumes that an emphasis upon 'struggle' in rural Mexico stands as a correlate of 'the ideology of individualism associated with machismo'.

Stephen Gudeman's early work, comparably, describes his informants as crucially oriented around the category of the individual, with autonomy and independence described as key local values; 'With a sense of shame and respect, the individual can defend himself (*defendarse*) and not be dependent on others.' (p79) This stress upon independence is gendered, with autonomy a primary masculine trait. 'To be truly manly a male must be independent.' (p129). Crucially, Gudeman makes the connection between this emphasis upon the autonomous individual and the prospects for collectively-oriented institutions; concluding that such cultural priorities mean that 'communal associations are generally ineffective.' (p84) Comparable depictions inform Marxian debates. Barry Lyons (2006) in his ethnographic history of a hacienda in Ecuador makes clear the extent to which

scholarly understandings of the rural inhabitants of large rural estates have been informed by Marxian political understandings which place the possibility of political action and potential revolutionary transformation on the presence of ‘horizontal’ social ties. Estate workers, Lyons makes clear, have frequently been understood to lack these horizontal ties, instead being seen as linked primarily via vertical relations of ‘dependency’ with patrons and estate owners. This led to a characterisation of hacienda peasants as comprising socially a ‘triangle without a base’, i.e., with each individual vertically tied to a patron or landlord, but without substantial ties developing among social equals, who remained divided from each other. Consonant with a Marxian perspective which locates the motive force of history in class-oriented collective action, action contingent therefore upon political *unity*, this perspective viewed hacienda peasants as unlikely sources of political movement.

Such assertions are by no means limited to Latin America, of course. Samuel Popkin (1979, pp26-7), in a study of Vietnamese peasants, suggests that ‘the possibility that mutual suspicion and mistrust [...] can impede or prevent collective action helps us to understand why there were political and religious movements that reorganized villages even in precapitalist society.’ While such analyses deploy a characterisation of rural populations as ‘individualists’ primarily to argue for cultural or social incompatibility with socialist and collectivist political or institutional forms, others have instead focussed on individualism as implying a cultural *compatibility* with a neoliberal epoch. Commenting on modes of individualism prevailing in rural Latin America, for example, John Gledhill identifies an ‘apparent resonance between some aspects of neoliberal ideology and grass-roots attitudes’ (Gledhill, 2008).⁸

⁸ “This kind of individualism is based on a relational model of social personhood, in which respect is due to persons (generally male) who prosper by their own efforts within the webs of family, kin, and patron—client relations. Yet it can also raise the ruthless pursuit of self-interest to a kind of moral value in an unjust world. This latter kind of “individualizing” morality is expressed in the Mexican idea that individuals can be divided into *cabrones* (a “bastard” in an admiring sense) or *pendejos* (literally pubic hairs, with the meaning of fools). The former are ruthless in pursuit of their own

Peasants as proto-socialists; resistance studies

However, a parallel tradition of analysis arrives at almost the inverse conclusion. At times this takes the form of arguments that rural Latin Americans exhibit a primordial cultural resonance with collectivist politics. In the case of Nicaragua, Roger Lancaster has pursued this line of thought in his early work (1988), arguing that folk traditions contained within them proto-socialist ideological possibilities—such as the redistributive elements of *Purísima* rituals, and the condemnation of illegitimate wealth implied by devil pact beliefs—which facilitated the influence of Liberation Theology and revolutionary ideology among popular classes in the recent history of the country. He argues in an analysis of the festival of Santo Domingo, for example, that, contrary to the explicit ritual meaning, ‘it is [...] through metaphor and indirection that Santo Domingo addresses the *real* subject of the revolt of the poor against the social order. A religious practice ostensibly “about” magical cures and saintly favours, acted out through a variety of puzzling idioms and symbols, is actually “about” popular revolt’ (p46). He presents his analysis as providing insight into why apparently ‘traditional’ segments of the Nicaraguan population were able to mobilise in collectivist revolutionary practice: ‘This sort of correspondence between traditionalism and revolution need not confuse us, if we keep in mind that the traditional religion already embodies a strong if indirect class consciousness.’ (p51) Such assumptions, indeed, were active in Sandinista political practice in the countryside, which drew on Freirian traditions of popular education in efforts to focus and hone these putatively nascent sentiments (cf. Montoya, 2012b).

At other moments in the peasant studies tradition, such lines of thought have been developed in relation to understandings of the historical development of capitalism, and the relationship of this process to the land-holding structures of the

interests and adopt the tactics necessary to convince the “other” that it will be less of a hassle to give them what they want, while the latter are naively trusting of the “other’s” ultimate goodwill and inevitably get “screwed” (*chingado*) in any social transaction.’ (Gledhill, 2008, p339)

Comunidad Indígena as an institution in Latin America. Such arguments trace a lineage to Wolf's (1955, 1986) classic analysis of the 'closed corporate peasant community'. This perspective has therefore drawn upon understandings of the role of processes of individualisation or the emergence of individual legal forms in theories of capitalist development or 'modernisation'. A significant iteration of this perspective exists in the Nicaraguan context in the form of Jamie Wheelock's (1985) influential argument about the development of coffee capitalism in the country (cf. Charlip, 2003, for a critique of Wheelock's account of historical proletarianisation in coffee-producing regions). Rural communities are seen as having made efforts to resist processes of capitalist development which involve wholesale expropriation of formerly-communal land. Early land reform proposals from the Sandinista state in the 1980s could therefore be conceived of as *returning* to the peasantry the possibility of realising forms of collectivity forcefully destroyed by processes of capitalist development. Scholarly explorations of local 'resistance' to these developmental processes in Latin American history—figured as collectivist politics operating to 'resist' individualising developmental processes—are mirrored in understandings of reactions to and responses to more recent neoliberal trends (e.g., Babb, 2002).

Agrarian policy in Nicaragua

Both elite discourse underpinning key policy interventions, and recent scholarship focused on the Nicaraguan case, identifies shifts between individual and collective social forms as a key site of political intervention and a privileged locus of what constitutes historical and social change. A substantial literature now exists documenting the intellectual underpinnings of Sandinista agrarian policies during 1980s, much of which is sensitive to the discursive construction of the peasantry in relation to understandings of development (Charlip, 2003; Hodges, 1986; Langley, 2001, 2004; Müller, 2010; Saldaña-Portillo, 2003) This joins a literature which explored the shifts in policy over the course of the decade, partly in response to

shifting political contingencies. Scholars have documented the ways in which policy shifts over the course of the 1980s reflected changing understandings within the FSLN regarding the appropriate course of rural development, and prevailing interpretations of rural motivations for Contra support (Baumeister, 1984, 1985; Deere, 1983; Deere, Marchetti and Reinhardt, 1985; Dore, 1989, 1990; Enriquez, 1991, 1997; Horton, 2013; Jonakin, 1997; Kaimowitz, 1986; Kaimowitz, 1988; Kroeker, 1996; Martinez, 1993; Wright, 1995). This literature paints the picture of an initially-dogmatic program of rural industrialisation, pragmatically modified over the course of the 1980s in response to rural discontent and demand for *individual* land holdings. Later studies investigate the substantial continuation of land reform and distribution undertaken by the government of Violeta de Chamoro (Close, 1999), along with titling and restitution efforts undertaken during the period after 1990. Rural difficulties in these accounts are frequently understood to be primarily a matter of insufficient tenure security (as will be further explored in Chapter 4; cf. Bandiera, 2007; Broegaard, 2005; Deininger and Chamorro, 2004; Stanfield, 1995).

Scholarly accounts of Nicaraguan communities published in recent years frequently orient themselves analytically in relation to a neoliberal politico-economic epoch taken to be both individualist and individualising (Enriquez, 2010; Horton, 2013; Rodgers, 2009), with attention given to local responses to, particularly *resistance* to, that context (Babb, 1998, 2002). In Babb's study of local social movements in Managua, for example, it is when collectivism becomes visible in the form of activist mobilisation that 'resistance' to the politico-economic context of a neoliberal epoch is perceived. Her analysis draws on assumptions about history comparable to those which animated the Sandinista revolutionary tradition; the notion that horizontal collectivity, realised in 'movements' of different kinds, is the key social force which propels desirable change. Identifying stark politico-economic epochs on the basis of shifts in policy at the national level, such analyses participate

in a historical ontology which views social and political change as primarily a matter of transitions or tensions between these categories and social forms.

In a number of key ways, the ethnography presented in this thesis problematises some of the analytical tendencies reviewed above. The details of my informants' involvement with land, with the cooperative and with Sandinista politics more broadly presented in the chapters which follow imply that sketching stark oppositions between peasants on the one hand and politico-economic and institutional contexts on other is not the most productive path of enquiry.

Indeed, I suggest that the apparent paradox described above—with rural Latin Americans and Nicaraguans presented at times as die-hard individualists, at times as proto-socialist communitarians—emerges from precisely this analytical tendency to think primarily in terms of a comparison between political context on the one hand, and a putatively coherent peasantry on the other. In different ways, such approaches locate the primary site of social dynamic on the (theoretically-inferred) point of contact between singular social entities; an individualising (decollectivising) neoliberal economy vs. the collective institutions of a previous political era; neoliberalism's ravages and the 'resistance' of popular sectors through practices of mutuality or mobilisation; a collectivist socialist state's impositions vs. an individualist rural population, among other formulations.

Identifying the stark transitions between distinct phases of governing ideology or broad socio-political process with an analytical opposition between the collectivism of the 1980s and the individualism of the neoliberal period, rural people can consequently show up, in the light of such analyses, as (contradictorily) opposed to both. It appears clear that such paradoxical conclusions emerge as an artefact of the varying analytical tools brought to bear upon their material by scholars themselves. The ethnographic approach adopted in this study offers the prospect of providing an empirical account of the diverse and multifaceted ways in which rural involvements with their political and institutional contexts have played out. A central

point which emerges across the chapters is that though great emphasis is indeed placed upon notions of 'struggle', social efficacy is frequently viewed as contingent upon mediating this embodied potency with sources of power posited as distant; and that this dynamic plays out in complex ways in relation to putatively collectivist institutional forms such as cooperatives, and Sandinista popular organisations.

For example, Chapter 2 shows how local land claims and assertions of eligibility in relation to the polyvalent notion of '*derecho*' within the cooperative are articulated in relation to understandings of efficacy and eligibility which, while making crucial reference to personal capacities, cannot be reduced to a notion of 'individualism'. Eligibilities emerging from the capacity of the labouring body to sweat and 'struggle' are understood to conjoin, crucially, with an allocative and distributive authority associated with the state, and are bound up with notions of revolution. Indeed, the validity of claims made on the basis of personal effort is intimately connected to local constructions of revolutionary subjectivity, and the ways in which the suffering of civil war has been subsumed within local ideologies of productivity based on the struggle of labour. Crucial here has been the way the suffering and struggle of war has come to be conceptualised as inaugurating a novel relationship with the state, one in which distributive forms of assistance and support play a central role.

Later chapters explore the ways in which Sandinista discourse pertaining to the importance of 'being organised' have been bound up with key assumptions regarding the nature of political agency and the kinds of social relation broadly understood to be beneficial. Chapter 6 demonstrates the ways in which this injunction to realise 'horizontal' political forms has shifted through incorporation into a local political cosmology which posit hierarchy and verticality as key principles underpinning productive relations. The figure of the president himself, as the source of crucial forms of an assistance posited as central, is shown to mediate this transposition, as participation in the institutional forms associated with being

organised becomes seen as a key way of retaining valued modes of social incorporation.

Further evidence that viewing rural people as simply culturally opposed to collectivist political forms emerges from attending to prevailing assumptions about personhood. Some of the key elements of rural culture which have been posited as indicating sheer incompatibility with collectivist forms—particularly ideas regarding ‘envy’, which construe neighbours as primary sources of danger—are revealed here as by no means standing in a simple relation of opposition to the institutional correlates of ‘being organised’. Chapter 5 explores some of the ways in which understandings of the pervasive danger of malignant envy tie into local efforts to ensure productive political involvements. Indeed, the benefits of being organised were perhaps the principal thing which envy was taken to threaten for my informants. Rather than simply prompting people to find collective forms unappealing, notions of envy—and the ‘suspicion’ to which they give rise (Bailey, 1971; Foster, 1979; Wolf, 1966)—served rather to prompt particular inflections of efforts to realise the right kind of collectivity.

Grand narratives of the global march of neoliberalism are also troubled by this perspective. Chapter 3 explores the ways in which discourses of vice (*vicio*) prevalent in recent trends towards Evangelical Christianity have been woven into local ethical repertoires. Rather than construing Evangelical Christianity as part of an overarching process of individualist globalisation, the chapter investigates the ways in which this key concept has come to offer a conceptual solution to a key cultural problematic; namely that of how to establish productive relations at varying scales. While offering a novel proposal for how to deal with this dilemma, the dilemma itself is long-standing and pervasive in rural Latin American life. Contrary to analyses which perceive a broad shift from a traditional communitarian Catholicism to a modernising individualised Pentecostalism, the chapter identifies key continuities

between established cultural concerns and these novel recommendations for right living.

In identifying these ways in which rural involvements with the Sandinista project and other aspects of their institutional and discursive context defy analyses which rely on a diametric opposition between individualist and collectivist forms, the thesis offers the prospect of coming to better understand recent experience among rural Nicaraguans. It has already been mentioned that Ortega's incumbency since 2006 shows up as somewhat ambiguous in relation to established epochal characterisations relying on oppositions between socialist and neoliberal governance. By developing a positive ethnographic description of prevailing ideologies of productivity and power, the thesis will additionally seek to illuminate the structures of 'clientelist' distributive politics which characterise this recent political phase.

Clientelism and dependency: Socialism for the 21st century

Since Daniel Ortega returned to power at the head of the FSLN in 2006, Nicaragua has been part of a growing number of Latin American countries with governments aligning themselves politically with the Venezuela of Hugo Chavez (and more recently Nicolás Maduro), associating with the ALBA political alliance, and employing leftist rhetoric while pursuing distributive social projects aimed at popular sectors of the population (for explorations of this 'new left', cf. Ardití, 2008; Cameron and Hershberg, 2010; Castañeda, 2006; Ellner, 2012; Montoya, 2012a; Muhr, 2008, 2010; Webber and Carr, 2012).

How to situate and characterise this political present in Nicaragua is a matter of ongoing contention among Nicaraguan commentators, along with Western scholars. Debates frequently centre around the key concepts of 'neoliberalism' on the one hand, and 'revolution' on the other, frequently employing the notions epochally in ways which imply broad historical periods. Ortega and the FSLN—whose communications output is now directed by Ortega's wife Rosario Murillo—endlessly

stress in their rhetoric the continuity of the ‘revolution’, the return to formal political power of a social movement that continued uninterrupted since the 1980s, and traces its heritage, of course, back to the original ‘struggle’ of Sandino.⁹ For their critics, this is pure rhetoric, entirely unreflected in any continuity of policy which might justify such terminology.

A recent piece in the Nicaraguan journal *Envio* by Mónica Baltonado (2014)—a founding member of the MRS political party¹⁰—exemplifies this perspective. Nicaragua is in no sense experiencing a ‘second stage’ of the revolution, she insists. Rather than revolutionary politics, the country is in fact undergoing increasing subordination to the ‘global logic of capital’, while political power is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small political oligarchy, primarily the presidential couple ‘Ortega-Murillo’. Neoliberalism is being consolidated under a smokescreen of revolutionary rhetoric.

Many of the scholarly works published in recent years articulate a comparable critique, often centred on the notion of neoliberalism as comprising a distinctive political era in Nicaragua (Babb, 1998, 2002; Enriquez, 2010; Horton, 2013). In such accounts, Ortega’s return to power in 2006 is often understood to have ushered in very little institutional challenge to key policy orientations of the previous neoliberal era under the administrations of Chamorro, Alemán and Bolañas. The picture presented, again, is one of a continuing neoliberalism accompanied by misleading revolutionary rhetoric and populist social programs.

For my informants in Gualaqueme, however, Ortega’s assertion regarding a continuing revolution is taken as entirely plausible. But is it the case, then, that

⁹ Indeed, Ortega’s famous assertion upon losing the 1990 election that the FSLN would continue ‘governing from below’ is consistent with this claim (Kampwirth, 2010b; Walker, 2003).

¹⁰ The Sandinista Renovation Movement (*Movimiento Renovación Sandinista*, MRS) is an opposition political party established by disgruntled former members of the FSLN. The group was established in 1995 and has participated in local and national elections since then, in a shifting series of political alliances.

Ortega's constituents have been duped by well-crafted propaganda? Do they believe his claims that the revolution continues—blinded, perhaps, by the meagre placations of social programs—while behind the scenes a diametrically opposed political and economic program is being enacted? This thesis will develop a perspective on rural involvements with Ortega's current political program which enables this kind of stark and simplistic opposition between political or economic truths and rhetorical fictions to be problematised. To understand what is at stake for rural people in these contested epochal characterisations, we need first to properly appreciate what is at stake in politics itself for participants. What might it mean to be part of the revolution for rural people? How are assertions that revolutionary possibilities continue locally understood? What does 'revolution' even mean in this context?

To grasp why the prospect of continuing revolution is held up as plausible, the role of the material flows and distributive politics of Ortega's incumbency as they intersect with local understandings of value, power and productivity need to be closely examined. Over the course of this thesis, the argument will be developed that for Sandinista supporters, the prospect of standing as a beneficiary of state programs involves far more than the simple possibility of material reward, but is rather bound up with encompassing visions of what constitutes a viable life. While the idea of exchanging a vote for concrete benefits is hardly alien to my informants, fully appreciating the importance attributed to distributive politics will require attending to the ways in which the diverse material flows of everyday life are understood to secure crucial relations of involvement and support with others at varying scales. The gifts and material flows which pervade rural life, it will be shown, stand as a crucial way in which the dilemmas of efficacy described above are negotiated; and the material components of state projects have been woven into these endeavours in efforts to incorporate presidential power.

Since Ortega's current regime places a central emphasis upon distributive political forms, notions of clientelism and populism tend to be among the most

frequently employed analytical models in describing the current status quo (Close and Deonandan, 2004; Close, i Puig and McConnell, 2012; Kampwirth, 2003, 2010a; Montoya, 2012a). Both the critical perspectives on Ortega's current incumbency, and the discursive output of the FSLN, it might be noted, draw on divergent notions of power, control and agency, leading to inverse understandings of empowerment. For the critics, Ortega's social programs are all about empowerment of the president himself; working to shore up the FSLN's 'control' over key sectors of the Nicaraguan population and key institutions, and to establish ever more firmly the personal position of the president and his wife. These understandings of power and control—in line with influential scholarly accounts of 'clientelism' (Scott, 1972a, 1972b)—construe beneficiaries of distributive programs as primarily exchanging political support and allegiance for the material goods and benefits accessed.

Meanwhile, official rhetoric and the analyses of supportive intellectuals within Nicaragua insist that these programs are part of a broad project of 'citizen power' (*poder ciudadano*), in which beneficiaries are increasingly mobilised into organs of participatory democracy; local community institutions such as Family, Health and Life Councils, Water Committees along with credit and service and savings cooperatives (e.g., Nuñez Soto, 2014). Such discourses theorise citizen participation as facilitating an enrolment of citizens into institutions of popular governance, enabling subaltern agency to be *realised*, rather than ceded to demagogues. Observers of the Nicaraguan media cannot fail to notice that the 'official' discursive output of the governing FSLN overwhelmingly focuses on social projects and their beneficiaries. Television and radio reports on Sandinista channels¹¹

¹¹ Media coverage in Nicaragua is highly polarised. The two principal privately-owned newspapers—El Nuevo Diario and La Prensa—both generally pursue an anti-Ortega agenda. La Prensa in particular is virulent in its critique, employing as standard the epithet 'unconstitutional president Daniel Ortega' in reference to the FSLN's leader, and frequently describing Nicaragua as in the midst of a 'dictatorship' comparable to the Somoza dynasty. El Nuevo Diario, while somewhat less extreme in its language, pursues a similar editorial line emphasising constitutional infringements and electoral irregularities, institutional failures and human rights concerns—although comments from individuals

typically feature extensive coverage of distributive performances, with grateful beneficiaries reciting speeches of thanks to the president a standard feature.¹²

Neither of these inverse characterisations of local involvements with Ortega's social programs—this thesis makes clear—adequately capture what is at stake for participants and beneficiaries themselves. This section will briefly review existing scholarly approaches to clientelism, and will proceed to explore the politically-polarised understandings of 'dependency' with which this sociological form is associated. With these opposed definitions drawing from inverse constructions of power and agency, it will be suggested that understanding is best served by employing the concept of dependency as an ethnographic heuristic, aimed at capturing key elements of rural understandings of efficacy and power. By examining the varying ways in which notions of dependence inform local practices and understandings in a range of contexts, the ways in which Ortega's recent distributive politics resonates with rural concerns will be illuminated. Taking this approach, it will be seen, problematizes the assumptions regarding power inhering in *both* established characterisations of dependency. Being a beneficiary for rural Nicaraguans is by no means conceptualised as involving a passive ceding of power or control. Indeed, the ethnographic chapters to follow clearly illustrate the intensive *activity* that is understood to be involved in the proper cultivation of dependencies of different kinds.¹³ However, the kinds of potency and possibility understood to be

sympathetic to the government are occasionally included. Sandinista channels, meanwhile, present an entirely positive picture of a country, as the official slogan has it, continually experiencing 'more victories'.

¹² I have no reason to think that such performances are anything other than spontaneous. Indeed, the formal articulation of thankfulness is a key mode of speech directed towards powerful individuals which I witnessed in a range of context during my fieldwork. Such recitals invariably contain explicit expressions of hope for further assistance. Chapter 6 provides several examples of such performances.

¹³ The account thus presents interesting parallels with key debates surrounding political cultures in Amazonianist ethnography, in particular efforts to theorise the role of dependencies, and paradigmatic understandings of 'master-pet' relationships. Comparable arguments have been made which contest characterisations of the subordinate position in such relationships as implying passivity

available through appropriate dependencies can hardly be described in terms of the autonomous and horizontal ‘citizen power’ (*poder ciudadano*) of Ortega’s rhetoric. Understandings of the necessity of hierarchy, political assistance across social distance, and personalist conceptualisations of political agency are integral to the kinds of value people understand to be available through the material flows of distributive social projects.

Dependencies of left and right

In relation to Latin America, the concept of dependency has been hugely influential through the tradition of dependency theory (Cardoso and Faletto, 1979; Escobar, 1998, 2011; Galeano, 2003). Challenging older modernisation theories of development, this tradition of thought revolves around notions of economic exploitation and domination in international relations. Although different positions within the tradition adopt varying perspectives on the mechanisms involved—indeed, whether it amounts to a singular tradition at all has been questioned (Larrain, 1989)—the countries of Latin America are broadly understood to have been compelled to adopt dependent economic ties with advanced economies. Through transfer of national surpluses to advanced economies—along with wastefully lavish consumption by small national elites—underdeveloped nations are understood, in some formulations, to be coercively tied into a capitalist world system (Baran, 1973; Baran and Sweezy, 1966; Larrain, 1989). Crucially, these related theories posited that underdevelopment was not something that preceded a future path of capitalist development and modernisation that each nation would follow independently, but rather was actively produced in the present through contemporaneous relations of exploitative extraction with advanced economies; i.e. through the imposition of malign forms of dependency.

(Bonilla, 2009; Fausto, 2008; Walker, 2012, 2013) These arguments will be explored further in the Epilogue.

While the principal thinkers in this tradition were primarily interested in theorising global capitalism and processes of development at an international scale, their use of the concept of dependency resonated with ethnographers and other social scientists who employed the concept in works analysing social relations at the level of the community (see Kearney, 1995, for an overview). In the field of social relations at the scale which concern this study, relations of hierarchy and dependency *within* Latin American nations have been understood to mirror, reflect and to stand in mutually-constitutive relation to these international ties of dependency (cf., Thurner, 1993). Dependency theory, additionally, had significant implications for the sociological characterisation of rural relations in Latin America. While the social relations of the hacienda, for example, had frequently been theorised as pre-capitalist and feudal, dependency theory insisted that because of the economic integration of the hacienda into the global economy, it had to be theorised as thoroughly capitalist in nature (De Janvry, 1981). Dependency, in such formulations, is a function of economic exploitation. Everyday social relations exhibiting elements of dependency are interpreted as consequences of local involvement with this exploitative global system, and ideologies of dependence cast as a kind of false consciousness shoring up that system.

While these theorisations of dependency have been associated with a Marxian tradition of the left, other uses of the term dependency are at times associated with ‘conservative’ critique of programs of state distribution and welfare. Morgen and Maskovsky (2003, p316), for example, relate how in the US, debate surrounding welfare reform ‘was framed in terms set by neoconservatives in the 1980s around the need to eliminate the socially unproductive “dependency” of welfare mothers.’ Other scholars, however, reveal the extent to which notions of dependency inform Western thinking regarding welfare far beyond the narrow circle of ‘neocons’. Fraser and Gordon (1994a, 1994b) indicate the extent to which notions of dependency as unquestionably negative and to be avoided informs the thinking of all sides of the

political spectrum, at least in the US. These ideas are of particular relevance for Nicaragua and my field site because of the extent of NGO activity in the country, and the degree to which efforts to avoid the putative perils of dependency have come to inform development discourse and practice within these institutions (Ferguson, 2013a). Critical accounts of the populist nature of 'New Left' regimes in Latin America draw on comparable notions of dependency in depicting the economically irresponsible nature of politicised hand-outs (cf. Castañeda, 2006).

In these latter formulations, dependency stands as an undesirable *mindset* or set of inculcated dispositions that is taken to be opposed to ideals of economic autonomy, independence and productivity. Specifically, these unfortunate characteristics are understood to have been inadvertently engendered in subjects through the receipt of forms of social assistance. Conditioned to expect help, beneficiaries lose the motivation or incentive to help themselves, and distributions intended to assist end up causing harm. While such theorisations of dependency can act as a rationale for advocating the simple abolition of forms of distributive assistance, these ideas also serve to inform policy aimed at minimising dependency as an effect of distribution. In contemporary development practice in Nicaragua, for example, they can be witnessed in strategies of stipulating conditions of participation, requiring beneficiaries of projects to themselves contribute labour rather than just passively receive; in theory in order to generate a sense of ownership and autonomy. In relation to political distributions, such ideas are most commonly articulated in critical accounts of clientelism. Clients are understood, in such analyses, as exchanging political support for concrete material rewards (but cf. Auyero, 1999, 2000a; 2000b, for a critical appraisal of such approaches).

It might be noted that the field site investigated in this study invites, in different ways, elements of each of these formulations of dependency. The cooperative was established in an area formerly occupied by large-scale haciendas, and many of my informants spent their youths prior to the revolution labouring in

these institutions. The role of *caudillismo* and patriarchal hierarchical relations in rural Nicaraguan life in the 19th century has been well documented (Dore, 2006; Hagene, 2002). Clearly, the forms of hierarchical social relation which characterised hacienda life remain of relevance. Similarly, state and NGO distributions and forms of welfare and assistance play a central part in contemporary life in the field village.

But while the concept of dependency suggests itself as pertinent for these reasons, neither of the above formulations are ethnographically productive. Each relies upon certain key understandings about power, political possibility and agency, understandings which are formulated in each case from the perspective of *a priori* theoretical postulates regarding key values, foundational assumptions regarding the nature of the political. Recent discussions within anthropology regarding the notion of dependency, I suggest, offer the prospect of rethinking the concept in order to avoid these potential pitfalls. In particular, James Ferguson (Ferguson, 2013a, 2013b) in recent work has argued that in contemporary South Africa, certain orientations among subaltern populations show up as somewhat embarrassing in relation to liberal ideals of autonomy and independence. He describes ways in which efforts are made to *actively* cultivate dependent relations, something which Ferguson reads as an effort to strive for social incorporation in a politico-economic context in which unemployment stands at a catastrophically high level: 'Increasingly, then, those suffering from what I call *asocial* inequality actually seek out *social* inequality.' (p223) Ferguson argues that this cultivation of dependent ties effectively operates as a social safety net.

In drawing attention to the way ties of dependence bring into play far more than just the material flows they might involve, Ferguson provides a valuable holistic perspective which—in addition to simply highlighting the *activity* frequently involved in cultivating dependencies—makes clear the importance of considering such cultivation in relation to the whole range of relevant local social ties; including those with kin, neighbours, distant powerful figures and nonhuman agents. This

thesis seeks to further advance the theorisation of dependence. I suggest that the concept can be most helpful ethnographically if re-theorised in relation to indigenous formulations regarding those factors of power and efficacy that the formulations described above take for granted. Specifically, by investigating the ways in which notions of dependency inform and are inflected by local ideas regarding the possibility of power, productivity and stipulated requirements for efficacy, we gain valuable insight into the involvements of rural Nicaraguans with the social and institutional forms conventionally analysed as involving the forms of dependency discussed above.

Such an approach makes clear that we need to examine the ways in which the material flows and exchanges of social programs such as those which characterise Ortega's incumbent administration come to be bound up with rural social ideologies in which material exchanges comprise a crucial way in which diverse sources of potency are recruited. Rather than viewing distributions as primarily having to do with clientelistic exchanges in which support simply is swapped for resources, the ways in which receipt of material flows ties in with understandings of the prospect of participation in forms of power expanding beyond the person is crucial. Chapter 5 makes clear that such ideas are crucial even at the domestic scale, wherein distinct gendered capacities are understood to require containment within the household through the mutual performance of particular kinds of labour. And just as the realisation of the household is always understood to be tenuous—since the gendered capacities contributing to its emergence are volatile and liable to destructive *uncontainment*—so the kinds of participation in distant modes of potency enabled by 'clientelistic' exchanges are themselves contingent upon continuing mutuality. Chapter 7 explores a case in which villagers, understanding themselves to have been cut off from the flow of potential beneficence from a local patron because of the 'envious' intervention of local leaders, vigorously seek to re-establish alternative paths of dependent connection with the Sandinista hierarchy.

It bears repeating that implications of passivity or powerlessness associated with notions of dependency do not appear to adequately capture what is taken to be at stake for those who pursue such relations. Chapter 6 makes clear that it is by no means the case that access to these kinds of resources is principally understood as contingent upon the benevolence, discretion or inscrutable volition of distant powers. Understandings of the fertile productivity of potential connection to the distributive capacities of outside powers is certainly crucial, yet such fertility is conceptualised as very much within the influence established by the ‘movement’ (*movimiento*) of local leaders. Just as Ortega himself is frequently viewed (and presents himself) as tapping into a lucrative abundance sourced in Venezuela, so local leaders are evaluated and criticised on the basis of their capacity to vigorously establish proper connections to sources of outside assistance. Bringing ‘projects’ to the village, assertively insisting upon local claims, and visibly performing a continual ‘movement’ in the pursuit of such goals are key values in such evaluations. Proper dependency, it is clear, requires strenuous *work* to establish and maintain.

Outline of the thesis

After Chapter 2 provides a brief introduction to the field site and a methodological discussion, Chapter 3 will provide a historical account of the village of Gualiqueme, touching on the lives of founding members of the cooperative prior to the revolution. The lands that comprise the cooperative’s collective title were previously part of a small number of large haciendas. Most of the current residents of the village lived in the local area prior to the revolution, and had various kinds of relationship with the large landowners who formerly dominated the territory. This chapter will provide a brief account of pre-revolutionary life, and will explore the ways in which villagers initially became involved in the Sandinista project—first as collaborators with early guerrillas and later as victims of Contra reprisals. The field site was created as a community to rehouse rural people displaced in such attacks, and simultaneously

comprised part of the Sandinista government's efforts to realise visions of an organised peasantry. The chapter will also explore local 'historicities' (Hirsch and Stewart, 2005), attending to the way in which historical narratives recounting these events perform key Sandinista values of change and transformation through emphasis of discontinuity. Local ethnic understandings—which comprise an ambiguous disavowal of the figure of the '*indio*'—will be shown to play into this emphasis placed on radical historical transformation.

Chapter 4 moves on to an account of the ways in which involvement with land within the cooperative has played out over its recent history, which has involved the informal division of formerly collective lands. Crucial over the course of this process have been the different ways in which the divergent notions of *derecho* have been deployed. Construing eligibility for the 'rights' and entitlements to land and other pertinent benefits in distinct ways, these different constructions of *derecho* draw upon varying understandings of efficacy and power, have underpinned opposed modes of relating to the land of the cooperative, and enact distinct ways of imagining the Sandinista state. Through an exploration of the ideas and assertions underpinning various key conflicts regarding cooperative land, the chapter will provide an analysis of the constitutive role these divergent constructions of entitlement have played in shifts in land ownership and use as the cooperative has transitioned from collective forms of labour towards personal land holdings.

Chapter 5 shifts focus, examining local domestic ideologies by exploring the ways they are engaged by recent religious developments. The chapter explores the ways in which the ethical discourse of 'vice', primarily associated with recent shifts towards Evangelical Christianity, speak to and intersect with kinship and household relations, and the potent gender constructs underpinning these ties. In doing so, the chapter will work to question the assumption that peasants orient themselves around a primary distinction between trusted insiders and dangerous outsiders, with political familialism and factionalist clientelism natural consequences of such

orientations. Demonstrating the ways in which local understandings of kinship revolve around notions of vulnerability, instability and valued dependencies, the chapter investigates continuities between tenuous relations with nearby kin and broader political dependencies on distant others.

Chapter 6 examines what has been termed Nicaragua's current political climate of 'assistentialism' (Montoya, 2012a). It will explore the ways in which resources are accessed along with local understandings of political leadership, a perspective captured in the importance placed on 'being organised' and the possibilities it opens. The ethnographic heart of the chapter comprises an analysis of local involvements with and understandings of state and NGO distributive projects, in particular flagship social projects of the incumbent Sandinista government, such as the *Bono Productivo*. Such projects have come to comprise a central theme in rural political imaginaries, and involvements with them bring key identities and claims into play. By setting evaluations of local leaders against prevailing assumptions about the workings and qualities of power, the ways in which foundational claims about human efficacy and productivity inform engagements with distributive politics will be documented.

Chapter 7 further explores some of the contours of this emphasis on being organised. As pointed out above, rural Central Americans have frequently been described in the ethnographic record as holding to assumptions about the qualities of other persons which fundamentally inhibit cooperative or collective endeavours. Ideas about the potentials of envy construct others as sources of danger, loci of malignant potencies which need to be guarded against, and have led to depictions of rural Central Americans as being 'individualists'. Other analyses, as already indicated, have viewed these same phenomena as constitutive of a particular form of egalitarian peasant collectivism which has historically 'resisted' the incursions of the individualist capitalist state. This chapter will explore the ways in which such understandings about personhood have intersected with the political context of

distributive assistance described in Chapter 6. It will be seen that the idiom of envy serves as a potent conceptual resource, both allowing perceived failures of the model of political efficacy described in Chapter 6 to be accounted for, and informing the efforts of a group of Gualiqueme residents to realign themselves politically in order to resolve that failure.

The final chapter will undertake an analysis of the distinctive Nicaraguan tradition of *La Purísima*, a Catholic ritual whose form—comprising efforts to solicit saintly assistance through performed acts of material distribution—resonates pertinently with the political and institutional context of villagers. Building upon comparisons and analogies drawn by Gualiqueme residents themselves between religious and political domains, the chapter arrives at a synthesis of the account of rural Nicaraguan understandings efficacy developed across the thesis, by evaluating the structure of this key ritual in relation to the themes explored in preceding chapters.

Chapter 2—Village overview and methodological considerations

This brief chapter aims to provide the reader with a sense of the physical setting of the village and a descriptive account of everyday life for residents. It will also make clear the research methods employed, and consider some of the ethical implications of the methodological decisions taken in the course of research.



Figure 1— A view of Gualiqueme. All photos are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

Arriving at the village

The village of Gualiqueme is most often reached from the town of Condega, which lies north of Estelí on the Pan American highway. A private operator runs a daily bus down to the town from the village each morning, returning in the afternoon, with the service increased to two buses during the months of the coffee harvest. From Condega it is approximately two hours' trip up into the mountains to reach the

village, the old US school buses struggling slowly along bumpy dirt tracks. The ease of the trip can vary, however, heavily affected by the quality of the roads. Each year's rainy season brings torrential flows of water which eat away at the compacted earth, exposing jutting rocks and cutting treacherous gullies. The ancient buses—refitted with heavy duty tyres and raised suspension—are able to handle the terrain however, even when heavily laden, roof-racks piled high with whatever villagers may be transporting home. During good years when the coffee harvest has been abundant and villagers have some money to spare the two bus services are woefully inadequate to handle the traffic, and as soon as buses get to the edge of the town, male passengers forsake the packed carriage and climb onto the roof, wedging themselves between the planks of wood, bags of cement, barrels of cooking oil, and packets of fertiliser that make up the regular rooftop cargo.

Condega itself lies next to the River Coco, and immediately upon leaving the town the bus crosses a narrow concrete bridge. Almost every year this bridge is washed away by the rains, sometimes succumbing just a few weeks into the rainy season, cutting Gualiqueme and other nearby villages off from easy access to the town. Once the water levels subside, the mayor will send a team of diggers to shift earth around so that buses are able to navigate down onto the shallow river floor, re-establishing the route until the bridge, eventually, is able to be rebuilt. A more substantial suspension bridge was once constructed at the crossing with the assistance of an NGO, but that was washed away when Hurricane Mitch struck in 1998, and has never been replaced.

After crossing the river, the bus follows the main road heading towards Yalí, passing through a series of small villages. The climate here is arid, and those who are able dedicate themselves to raising cattle, along with the staples of maize and beans. Gradually, as the altitude rises, the climate shifts, and the red and sandy vistas give way to scraps of green. As the journey continues, a visitor will notice a continual series of large notices by the side of the road, announcing the completion of a

government or NGO project of some kind. Crossing the river, a sign announcing last year's successful repair of the bridge will be seen, with the total cost of the works in *córdobas* prominently displayed.¹⁴ Passing the schools in each village, fading signs staking a claim to the building's construction by whichever government was in power at the time will still be visible. Many such signs are faded to the point of illegibility, but the practice clearly goes back at least to the administration of Alemán, whose beaming face and electoral slogans can be seen next to the figures detailing the construction costs of some of the schools. Large signs in the distinctive garish pink of the current Sandinista administration announce the electrification of a village here, the construction of fifty 'dignified houses' (*viviendas dignas*) there, the funding of a vegetable distribution centre (*estación de acópio*) or the construction of a community centre. In the countryside, these prominent and politicised announcements of public works are the principal form of public communication, far outnumbering any kind of commercial advertising (cf. Colburn and Cruz, 2012, p110).

Most of the houses visible from the window of the bus are modest, but there is a noticeable shift as the road winds away from Condega. While villages nearer the town have a high number of brick and breeze-block buildings, the number falls steadily as you travel further from town, with an increasing amount of adobe, and an increasing incidence of makeshift roofing. After passing the village of El Chipote, the bus takes a turn onto a smaller, bumpier, steeper road. Here, the bus starts to climb sharply, struggling uphill and entering the mountains proper. During the rainy season these roads are in a constant process of erosion, and the journey may be interrupted as the drivers undertake some impromptu road works, loading gravel onto the back of the bus in order to fill in particularly severe potholes along the way. Occasionally villagers will undertake this journey on horseback or bicycle. Any pickup truck visiting the village will find itself inundated with requests for a 'ride'

¹⁴ The *córdoba* is the Nicaraguan currency. It was valued, at the time of research, at around 20-22 *córdobas* to the US dollar.

(the English word is used), and such requests are not often refused. But the bus is now the principal means of connection with the town. Residents of nearby villages who lived there prior to the revolution recall that in their childhoods the trip to town and back used to be a whole day's trek. There were just narrow tracks in those days, wide enough to travel on horseback; but not everyone could afford horses. Leaving shortly after dawn would allow the traveller to reach Condega on foot by midday, and after supplies had been purchased setting off by 1 or 2pm would mean that home could be reached not too long after dark.



Figure 2— A view of the village, showing the main road and bus.

‘A proper town’

The village itself is formed around a number of intersecting dirt tracks. The houses which were built by the original NGO construction project (see Chapter 3) comprise a central area. These buildings are tightly spaced, each with a relatively small yard. Many residents consider such houses to have insufficient distance between them, and a number of former residents of this area have moved and established households in

more spacious areas at the outskirts of the residential area. The close spacing makes it very difficult to keep animals without them intruding on other people's property, a frequent source of disputes (see also Montoya, 2012b). Of course, this original village was constructed at a time when it was assumed by policymakers that residents were on a path of transition away from being a peasantry, towards being rural industrial workers (Saldaña-Portillo, 2003; Wright, 1995). The keeping of pigs or chickens by individual families was not, it appears, factored into that original plan.

Over the years since its foundation the village population has increased considerably, which has led to a number of additional houses being constructed. These can be identified by their adobe walls, as opposed to the concrete-adobe mix of the original dwellings. The size of newly constructed buildings has depended on the resources available to the owner; and they range from very modest dwellings requiring a mere 600 adobe blocks, to larger buildings of around 2000. Though multi-story adobe buildings are possible, and can be found in some nearby villages, none exist in Gualiqueme. Some of Gualiqueme's newer adobe houses, it should be noted, though ostensibly made of more modest materials, are in visibly better condition than the original project houses. Many residents of the original homes retain the timber and roofing panels provided by the project, which after two and a half decades are showing considerable wear. At the time of research, the number of residences had risen from an original number of approximately eighty to over 140.

Though a few families live with many members to a single dwelling, the relatively low cost of building a small adobe house—albeit perhaps one with just a plastic sheet for roofing to begin with—means that most young couples are able to establish separate households once their relationships are formalised. When possible, such houses are often constructed on part of a parent's plot (*solar*) sectioned off for the purpose. Obviously this hasn't been possible for those families living in the central part of the original residential area, which has led some children of such families to establish their own dwellings at the outskirts of the village. In such cases

frequent visiting between houses continues, and in many cases newer houses are dependent upon the water supply and washing facilities of longer-established households. While many houses have mains electricity, newer constructions have had to tap into the supply of nearby kin, if possible, or live without it.

Individual house plots are generally separated from those of neighbours with barb-wire fencing, though sometimes kin groupings will share a single fence. A primary purpose of this fencing is to keep out wandering animals belonging to



Figure 3—One of several village *pulperías*, small family-run shops

neighbours. Such animals are highly controversial, and the practice of letting them wander freely in search of food is a frequent topic of lively complaint (cf., Montoya, 2012b). Many of those who have the space also grow crops within their house plots, often planting maize, and in some cases cultivating vegetable gardens (partly in response to the recent direction of many NGO projects; see Chapter 6). It is damage to these crops which is the principal concern regarding wandering animals, and

constant vigilance and work—repairing fences, and doubling up barbed wire with thorny branches or thick banana stems, for example—is often required to prevent intrusions.

In addition to residential buildings there is a primary school, a health centre, a small Catholic chapel (*ermita*) and two dedicated Evangelical churches (*templos*), and a hotel. The health centre was almost never open during the time of research, and most residents had to travel to one of the adjacent villages for medical services when they were required. A secondary school operates in a neighbouring village, requiring a journey of an hour or so on foot, and a number of Gualiqueme youths study there as ‘Saturday students’ (*sabatinos*). Others, generally those able to stay with a relative during the week, study full-time at the secondary school in Condega. A 2006 educational survey undertaken by the municipal authorities in Condega reported that of thirty six children in Gualiqueme between three and six years old, fourteen were enrolled in preschool education; and of ninety two aged between seven and twelve, eighty one were undertaking primary classes. Of youths aged between thirteen and seventeen, twenty of the fifty nine resident in Gualiqueme were studying in a secondary institution of some kind. Five of the forty seven youths between eighteen and twenty two registered as resident in the village were studying in higher education. Such figures—which seem entirely plausible on the basis of my knowledge of the village—represent a dramatic shift in educational experience in comparison with that known by older generations of villagers, many of whom remain illiterate. The same survey records ninety five of the 502 residents of the village at the time as being illiterate.

A typical day

The day starts before dawn for many women in the village, who rise to get the hearth fire going in order to prepare coffee and start making tortillas. The rhythmic sound of women ‘palming’ (*palmeando*) tortillas, beating maize dough into flat disks with

the palm of their hand, fills the village each morning. Men may rise at the same time or slightly later, expecting to be served coffee before they take to the fields. Indeed, the practicalities of eating play a large part in the structure of the working day. Since the process of preparing food—starting the fire, washing and milling maize, palming tortillas and cooking them one at a time on the *comal*, washing and boiling beans and perhaps cooking rice—is so time-consuming, it is usually around 8am before a proper breakfast is fully prepared. Ideally, someone will be available to deliver this meal to the men working in the fields who will have left an hour or so earlier, but if that isn't possible then starting work may have to be delayed until breakfast can be taken, or time may have to be taken out to return to eat. Depending on the time of year and the particular task being undertaken, work will generally stop in order to return home in order to eat the midday meal. At peak harvest times, some will choose to spend longer in the fields, taking sufficient food to eat all but the evening meal while working. The utter dependence of men on women to prepare their food was particularly striking at times when unexpected circumstances took their wives or mothers away from home. I knew of occasions when a man would travel to stay in neighbouring villages where domestic services from female relatives would be readily available, rather than attempt to cook for themselves, even though they were fully capable of doing so (see Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of these gendered domestic norms).

The nature of agricultural work means that there are not always necessarily tasks to be undertaken with any urgency, however. On days when meetings were called, for example, most villagers would be able to leave their agricultural work for a day, although on occasions they might resent doing so (especially if it then turned out that the meeting was cancelled or postponed, as frequently happened). At quieter times of year, the construction of adobe housing and repair work becomes a principal activity, and villagers may have more opportunity to visit relatives living in nearby villages or towns.

Some, though, may take the opportunity to travel in search of work. Migration is a factor in local livelihoods, but as residents themselves point out, it is nowhere near as significant in Gualiqueme as in some other Nicaraguan villages (cf. Nyberg Sørensen, 2014). Nobody permanently resident in the village had ever travelled to the US, for example, although stories abound of those who had made the journey; illegally (*mojado*), of course. Legal migration to the US, or even to Costa Rica since the introduction of a significant charge for entry, isn't really considered a possibility. Many young men have spent seasons working on the Atlantic Coast or in



Figure 4— Young Gualiqueme men sow beans using the traditional digging stick (*cobín / espeque*).

Costa Rica. Honduras, which is much easier to get to, is also a frequent destination, and it is common for those who don't have coffee of their own to travel there during the coffee harvest.¹⁵ More localised mobility is also a minor factor, in response to the

¹⁵ Mendoza Vidaurre (2013) notes that even many rural Nicaraguans who possess their own coffee prefer to migrate in search of immediate harvest earnings, as opposed to investing the time required to maintain their farms as technical advisors recommend; a practice he identifies as contributing to the

seasonal labour possibilities offered by the tobacco season. Large tobacco enterprises are a principal part of the economy in the area surrounding Estelí, and it is not uncommon for younger villagers to spend a season living in accommodation provided by the farms. The income from such employment is much more reliable than any locally-available day labour, but I generally heard people speak about the prospect negatively. Living away from home involves living expenses, and the additional income available was often seen as being frittered away having to purchase what was normally available without cost; particularly services such as food and the washing of clothes, ordinarily provided by the labour of female kin.

Remittances from family members based in Costa Rica are a part of some family's economic repertoires, and phone calls to such relatives almost always include requests for particular financial contributions. Mobile phone communication is developing fast in Nicaragua, and coverage in the village improved over the course of research. When I first arrived, the nearest spot where it was possible to 'grab some signal' (*agarrar señal*) was on the outskirts of the village five or ten minutes' walk away. By the time I completed my fieldwork, the construction of an additional mast in another nearby town meant that it became possible to pick up signal, albeit intermittently and only in certain places, within the village itself. Most families now have access to a phone, and speaking to relatives in Costa Rica is one of the principal reasons people are willing to incur the considerable expense of buying credit.

***La roya*: the 2011-2 coffee rust epidemic**

My period of research spanned two coffee harvests, and the contrast between the two seasons was striking. The season of 2010-11 was relatively good for Gualiqueme

poor state of many coffee trees in Nicaraguan small farms, and their consequent vulnerability to rust disease (*la roya*). See following section for a discussion of coffee rust.

producers. Prices for coffee were at a high, and many producers experienced plentiful harvests. But 2011-2 saw an epidemic of 'coffee rust' (*la roya*), a fungal infection of coffee trees which can severely affect levels of production (Cressey, 2013; Mendoza Vidaurre, 2013). This coincided with a poor year's harvest of 'basic grains' (*granos básicos*), and with a considerable decrease in the international price of coffee. The immediate economic effects of this crisis were clearly visible in the everyday life of the village. Buses which a year previously had been struggling to handle their overflowing loads of passengers and cargo were running almost empty. In 2011-12, nobody had any money available for trips to town. While 2010-11 found Gualiqueme the frequent target of travelling salespeople aiming to persuade residents to buy consumer items on credit, not a single agent entered the village the following year. A matter of weeks after the coffee harvest season had passed that year, many families—having rapidly sold the entirety of their meagre crop of coffee in order to repay debts accrued in the months prior to harvest—were already re-purchasing coffee at double the price they had sold it for. It was not long before some villagers were reduced to a situation of some desperation. Rumours soon spread about which individuals or families had run out of maize or beans; a predicament which was considered too shameful to be discussed openly. The concerns documented in this thesis were a significant part of Gualiqueme life prior to this particular economic conjuncture. However, this situation gave a particular inflection to the themes of assistance and struggle, and I will make reference to the '*roya*' crisis several times in the chapters to follow.

Research strategies, methodological considerations and access

This thesis is based upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted between November 2011–July 2012, and January 2013–July 2013, amounting to fifteen months in total. In addition, a preliminary six week research trip to Nicaragua was conducted in the summer of 2010. Two individuals assisted me with the location of a field site. I spoke

to the president of a large association of cooperatives, and also a researcher based in Nicaragua with a close relationship with cooperatives, who each recommended a number of potential sites to visit. Because of the way I initially designed my research, I was looking specifically for a cooperative which was established as a collectivised CAS during the Sandinista land reform in the 1980s. As it happened, none of the cooperatives I visited on that initial tour met this criteria, but one of them—the Sacuanjoche cooperative mentioned below—had members who lived in close proximity to Gualiqueme. It was while being shown around the local area by a member of Sacuanjoche that I initially encountered the village I selected as a main field site.

It did not appear surprising to Gualiqueme residents that a foreigner may take an interest in their lives and wish to live among them. Throughout the 1980s, it was very common for *internationalistas*¹⁶ to undertake stays in rural locations, and several individuals had spent periods living in Gualiqueme and its neighbouring villages. I would often be told of the extent to which these individuals had ‘helped’ (see Chapters 3 and 7 for further discussion of the primary importance attributed to the capacity of powerful individuals to ‘help’). My wife and I initially arranged to live with our original host’s family in the village adjacent to Gualiqueme. I spent many of my days travelling up the mountain to Gualiqueme, and after a few months I arranged with a family there to move in. We agreed that we would pay to repair a dilapidated building to live in, which they were at that point using to store animal feed, and in addition purchase some basic food supplies, and in exchange be provided with food over the course of the research.

My time was spent in a number of ways during the period of fieldwork. I conducted around thirty formal, recorded semi-structured interviews, particularly

¹⁶ This term was commonly used in Nicaragua to refer to the many foreign individuals who travelled to the country in support of the revolution after 1979.

towards the end of the period of research when I had developed specific research themes that I wanted to ask directed questions about. However, the majority of the data I gathered was obtained through my efforts to involve myself in the everyday life of villagers as a participant-observer.

Meetings

A key research activity was participating in meetings; those of NGOs, political meetings held in Gualiqueme and surrounding villages, and those of the various cooperatives active in the area. The Sacuanjoche cooperative generously allowed me to attend the regular meetings held by their *directiva* in the town of Condega. As a relatively successful cooperative with ties to international buyers and other local organisations, these meetings were invaluable in gaining an appreciation of the local institutional and economic context of relevance to Gualiqueme. I also attended several assemblies of the neighbouring cooperative of San Nicolás, though I soon found that being a village away made it difficult to know when these meetings would happen. On a number of occasions I travelled to the village to an assembly, only to find that everyone there knew that the meeting had been rearranged to some unspecified future date.

The majority of meetings I attended, however, were either in the village of Gualiqueme, or with residents of the village who I accompanied to meetings in nearby locations. Once I was living in Gualiqueme, I made an effort to attend every meeting that I became aware of. This research strategy was aided by the fact that the village 'little hotel' (*hotelito*) was used by a number of different organisations as a meeting space (I will discuss this hotel more fully in Chapter 7). Often I would have heard about a meeting in advance, but sometimes I would simply notice that people were heading to the hotel, ask what was going on, and head along myself. Though it initially felt intrusive, whenever I turned up and requested permission to participate—whether it was in meetings of cooperatives, NGOs, those held by local

politicians or religious groups—I was made to feel welcome, and people didn't seem to consider my constant inquisitiveness problematic. My status as a foreigner from a wealthy nation could well have been a factor here, of course. Occasionally I would find, somewhat to my embarrassment, that my presence appeared to shift the content of the meetings; one assembly held by a credit and savings cooperative seemed to become a lesson in that cooperative's history for my benefit. But much more frequently my presence would simply be tolerated, and I felt that I was able to be present as a reasonably neutral observer. People appeared to understand and encourage my interest, and once it became clear that I was keen to attend more or less any local meeting, I would often be told about upcoming events by contacts in the village.

But it was by no means the case that I was always able to attend locally-held meetings. Sometimes I would discover a key meeting had taken place only after the event. For example, a meeting which was held to elect local members of the *Gabinete de la Familia, Salud y Vida*, which I was keen to observe, I found out about only several weeks later. Though frustrating, it became clear to me that such experiences were hardly only my own; indeed, exclusions as well as inclusions became a source of insight. As I will discuss in detail in Chapter 6, the need to *know* about the fact that a meeting is going to take place—and any particular individual's dependence upon others to keep them informed by word of mouth—is a crucial factor in local dynamics of 'being organised'. It should also be noted that the specific events which I was kept informed about were no doubt closely influenced by the particular villagers with whom I developed the closest ties; my ability to strive for 'immersion' in local activities was structured by the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion through which local alliances and enmities played out. Had I been living with a different family, for example, it is entirely possible I would have gained a somewhat different perspective on local life.

It was by no means only the actual content of meetings which was of value for my research, though this was often extremely interesting. The experience of joining in with the *process* of participation was itself just as productive. I have already referred to the dynamics of finding out about the existence of a meeting in the first place. On many occasions I accompanied a group of Gualiqueme villagers as they travelled on foot to a neighbouring village in order to attend political meetings (see Chapter 5). Being part of such journeys was a useful research method, as conversation along the way would frequently cover themes of great relevance. Just as importantly, experiencing along with other participants the frustrations of meetings suddenly rearranged, delayed or cancelled was insightful.

Labour

I also made an effort to participate frequently in the everyday agricultural labour practices of villagers. Due to the gendered division of labour which prevails in rural Nicaraguan life (see Chapter 5), much of this activity comprised a predominantly male domain. Harvesting and threshing beans, transporting sacks of produce with mule or horse, planting, cleaning, picking, washing, depulping, and delivering coffee, and planting maize and beans with digging stick and with the help of oxen were among the tasks I became familiar with. During the months prior to the rainy season a key activity is the making of adobe for construction projects, and I participated in a number of house-building projects, as well as involving myself with the constant process of minor repair-work in the household I became a part of. I primarily arranged to assist individuals with such tasks on a day-to-day basis, but on occasion during the coffee harvest I spent a few days at a time living in houses constructed up in the mountain farms. Becoming involved with this range of labours both allowed me to become familiar with work practices, and to pass time with villagers in a space away from the residential area. This geographical diversity of research locations was also important due to the ways in which different normative standards prevailed in

different spaces. As the groups of men gathering to drink *aguardiente* each Sunday just beyond the boundaries of the village made clear, ethical injunctions varied spatially; what was beyond the pale for many men within the vicinity of their households was acceptable in a different location. The same was true of appropriate conversation. It is notable that many insightful conversations with men on themes such as sexuality were held in the fields, away from the female domain of the household (cf. Montoya, 2003).

Household

The household which my wife and I became a part of during the period of research was a crucial source of insight. Esperanza, her husband Erwin their children Wilber, Maritza and Margarita were key sources of information, and feature centrally in the chapters that follow. Much of my time was spent with one or another member of this family, and much was learned simply by passing time in the family kitchen or yard (*solar*), as a constant stream of neighbours came to chat with our hostess. Despite the rigidity, in some ways, of rural Nicaraguan gender roles, I didn't feel entirely excluded from female domains. It was primarily through the many hours I spent in Esperanza's kitchen that I had access to details of the domestic sphere. The fact that my wife was living with me for much of the research period perhaps contributed to an ability to visit and interview female villagers. Although my gender undoubtedly excluded me from access to certain kinds of information about female lives, I didn't feel entirely prevented from developing a familiarity with the domain of the household, primarily through the lives of Esperanza and her daughters.

However, there were clear limitations to such access beyond my host family. One young woman pointed out, as I chatted with her and her family on their porch, that it would be entirely inappropriate for her to greet me or any other man on the street. Such casual conversation away from the space of the home—where the guarantee of parental supervision meant that conversation didn't threaten

reputation—was understood to have serious implications for a woman’s character (see Chapter 5). Since many of my conversations were with men I passed on the street, or with groups of men hanging out in outside spaces, it is clear that my research access was significantly slanted by my gender.

Over the course of research I established relationships of regular visiting with a number of other households and individuals. By and large, rather than selecting informants randomly in the hope of gaining an objectively ‘representative’ sample, such individuals were those who were receptive to my presence, who were keen to talk and appeared to appreciate my enquiries, and who I encountered through the network of my existing contacts. Although I feel that I accessed varying perspectives, it is entirely possible that the kinds of information I became familiar with were inflected to a degree by this method. And of course, there were many villagers who I spoke to very rarely or not at all, and some people who I attempted to develop research relations with appeared reluctant to participate in my project. I generally didn’t pursue such possibilities beyond a few attempts.

Religion

I also involved myself in a variety of local religious practices and events. I participated in significant Catholic events throughout the year, in particular attending *Purísimas*, baptisms, village processions and funerary practices. No Catholic weddings were held in the village during the time of research. I was also a regular participant in a local ‘little community’ (*pequeños comunidades*) bible-reading group hosted by one of doña Esperanza’s sons, and occasionally visited some of the other local groups. My interest in Catholic practices was assisted by becoming involved with a local group of musicians, a strategy facilitated by my ability to play guitar. Live music is central to almost all Catholic events, and I accompanied this group to numerous prayer sessions and ceremonies, several times joining them on lengthy journeys to other villages to play at birthday celebrations or other religious

events. A liberation theology group also held regular Sunday meetings in the village, which I attended regularly towards the latter part of my research. I accompanied this group to several of their regional meetings in Estelí.

While there were two significant Evangelical groups with churches in the village, I established a research relationship primarily with one of them. I frequently participated in their daily services (*cultos*), and attended events such as baptisms, prayer sessions held in private residences, and ‘campaigns’ (see Chapter 5). Although I was familiar with the pastor of the other group, who I interviewed and visited regularly, I never attended their *cultos*. In addition to attendance of these formal religious practices and events, religious ideas and theological references were a continual presence in the everyday conversations I engaged in, and the ethnographic content of the chapters to follow is based at least as much upon these quotidian engagements with religious ideas as with the formal sphere of involvement.

Formal interviews

I made the decision to compensate informants for participation in the formal interviews I conducted towards the end of my period of research. By paying seventy *córdobas* for agreeing to participate in an interview that could take up to three hours, I hoped to provide fair compensation for their time. I was conducting these interviews at a time of considerable economic hardship within the village, after a poor harvest of beans and maize, and a serious coffee rust epidemic which dramatically affected local incomes. I considered offering payment to be a way of enabling informants to participate without forsaking the prospect of alternative earnings for the day (although in many cases, especially among female participants, it is unlikely that alternative sources of income would have been possible). Seventy *córdobas* was slightly less than the eighty which could be expected to be earned as a day labourer at the time of research. I chose this figure as it seemed to represent a reasonable balance, not being so high that potential participants couldn’t refuse

(several did), but standing as a reasonable incentive to participate (on payment in ethnographic interviews, see Bernard, 2011, p157).

While such payments could conceivably have introduced the possibility of bias, I feel that the free-ranging, conversational and relatively unstructured nature of the interviews made this unlikely. I don't think it would have been at all clear to participants what it was that I may have wanted to hear. I mostly conducted no more than two such recorded interviews with any given individual.

Chapter 3—Transformation and assistance in local historicity

This chapter will provide a historical account of the formation of Gualiqueme and its early years as a collectivised cooperative, along with a brief portrayal of the rural society that existed in the region prior to the revolution. The information presented here has been assembled from a number of sources. A small amount of published material exists which directly concerns the area of the field site.¹⁷ But my primary source has been the oral testimony of residents of Gualiqueme and surrounding villages. Formal semi-structured interviews were conducted with villagers, but much information emerged through informal conversations in the course of getting on with everyday life; it was hardly necessary to enquire specifically about the past in order to gain access to people's understandings of it. In addition, contact was made with the descendants of one of the former *hacendados* (estate landlords), who provided a rich account of life in the area prior to the revolution. As will become clear, however, the aim here will not only be to provide a reconstruction of 'what really happened'. Rather, in line with recent calls to attend to the distinctive forms of 'historicity' in particular contexts (Hirsch and Stewart, 2005; Hodges, 2000, 2008, 2010), the chapter will explore the ways in which local understandings of history are related to and inflected by ongoing social and political concerns, dialectically informed by key cultural priorities of the continuing present.

Existing scholarship makes clear that efforts to instil certain forms of historical consciousness were integral to revolutionary efforts in Nicaragua (Montoya, 2012b; Saldaña-Portillo, 2003). Cultivating particular understandings of an oppressive past and present was understood by the Sandinistas to be necessary in order to facilitate the formation of proper revolutionary subjects.¹⁸ Proper political

¹⁷ I refrain from citing these materials directly in order to maintain the anonymity of the field location.

¹⁸ Part of the general Marxian concern with the prospect of a 'class-in-itself' becoming a 'class-for-itself'.

action, in line with socialist tradition, was understood to be a product of particular forms of ‘consciousness’ (Saldaña-Portillo, 2003). The form historical narratives take among Gualiqueme residents is in part, undoubtedly, the product of the educational effort which emerged from these priorities, a discursive campaign that played out in diverse ways; through early guerrilla agitation, the later literacy crusade, ongoing political meetings and rallies, school curricula, and the output of the Sandinista media, among other channels.¹⁹ It has hardly been the case, however, that rural populations have straightforwardly absorbed FSLN prescriptions for appropriate historical understanding (cf. Montoya, 2012b). The process of coming to actively employ key historical concepts and perspectives drawn from a Sandinista discursive tradition has involved a continual interplay with local priorities, and partly stands as a process of reworking, adaption and conceptual transformation.

The first part of the chapter will provide an account of the history of Gualiqueme, constructed from the narratives provided by villagers. But parts two and three will move to an exploration of the way these narratives discursively perform and enact two central values, each of which binds the construction of historical knowledge into broader social and political concerns. Firstly, a crucial notion of *transformation* runs through local narratives. The revolution—congruent, perhaps, with normative Sandinista understandings of history (cf. Montoya, 2012b, Chapter 2)—is presented as a radical break, one which dramatically and fundamentally transformed people’s lives. This rupture stands as a definitive epochal marker, marking the temporal boundary between two fundamentally different times.²⁰ The transition between them, of course, is morally inflected; the time prior to the revolution is characterised in many accounts as unequivocally bad, and the revolution is depicted as bringing liberation and progress. But what will principally

¹⁹ On the literacy crusade, see Arnove (1981) for a contemporary account. Langley (2001) provides a more recent analysis, and Valenzuela (2011) usefully collates direct testimony from a range of individuals who participated in the process as ‘*brigadistas*’.

²⁰ Cf. (Robbins, 2007) on the theoretical implications of notions of rupture for anthropology.

be stressed here is the way in which this moralised transformation is understood to have established a foundational and fundamental political relation, one between the ‘the people’, or ‘the poor’, and the agency and potentials of the revolutionary state. And as will be made clear, among Gualiqueme residents understandings of ethnicity have come to stand as a key way in which these understandings of transformation are articulated.

There is also a crucial sense in which the history of the village is viewed as being coterminous with a series of interventions by ‘organisations’ of different forms, including those of the state. Such constructions revolve around the theme of *assistance* (cf. Roberts, 2013), a concept which will be seen in later chapters to play a pivotal role in local understandings of efficacy and power. The kinds of transformation and progression which structure historical narratives—the kinds of notable occurrence which are viewed as propelling the shifts, transitions and developments taken to be the stuff of history itself—are predominantly described as having come about through the critical interventions of outside agents. Actors such as NGOs or significant foreigners working as leaders of these organisations, powerful politicians, the national government, or the president himself are presented as vital sources of a fundamental assistance which has guaranteed and sustained the life of the community. As will be seen later in the thesis, the concern to establish relationships of support with, and even ‘dependency’ (Ferguson, 2013a) upon powerful outside figures is a continuing motif in Gualiqueme political life. While these issues will be interrogated in more detail in later chapters, it is crucial to recognise the extent to which understandings of the community’s foundation and continuing viability is construed, within such narratives, as having been contingent upon the significant interventions of such actors.

This is a chapter, then, about change and transformation as historical facts. It should not be doubted that tremendous change has indeed taken place, and that the lives of Gualiqueme residents have in many ways been dramatically transformed by

the revolutionary process. But it also concerns the ways in which change and transformation have been enacted and enunciated as principal *values* informing and inflecting local historicities; shaping political goals, structuring self-understandings and underpinning articulations of identity. It is hoped that the potential tension implicit here between notions of history as ‘what really happened’, and ethnographically-sensitive depictions of the way in which constructions of the past play into the ongoing concerns of the present, can serve to strengthen the account which follows, rather than undermine it (Hirsch and Stewart, 2005). I take it as given that attention to the performative role these ideas and priorities play in the continuing present should in no way be assumed to necessarily diminish the validity, accuracy or truth of the accounts they structure and inflect.

Part 1: Pre-1979 society, the coming of revolution, and the early years of the Gualiqueme cooperative.

Before the revolution, the land now comprising the cooperative’s holdings belonged to just a few substantial haciendas. In the immediate local area there were three major landowning families of note; those of Carlos Garcia, Pedro Olivas, and Orlando Ramos. Fragments of the physical structures of these old estates survive, scattered across the local landscape. Some dwellings in the neighbouring village of El Zapote, originally part of the Gualiqueme cooperative, are built literally in the ruins of the old hacienda premises (Chapter 4 will provide further details on the splitting off of this sector). Residents have taken advantage of the crumbling remains of a brick wall here, the concrete flooring of an old coffee patio there, and the exposed surviving pillars of the long burned-down estate house to supplement their own modest housing constructions. In Gualiqueme, too, the physical remnants of the old estate remain visible. An ornamental lake that remained desolate and overgrown for

many years has only recently been renovated by an NGO with the hope of attracting tourists to the community.²¹ Of the estate buildings formerly belonging to the Olivas



Figure 5—The ruins of one of the old hacienda buildings

family, only a few overgrown pillars and isolated concrete blocks remain. The neighbouring cooperative of San Cristobal built its *beneficio* (coffee-processing plant) on the foundations that remained after the hacienda building—another of Carlos Garcia’s residences—had been destroyed by the Contra.

These old estates, in their day, dominated the region economically and socially, coming to possess vast swathes of land.²² Dedicated principally to cattle-

²¹ The lake has, unfortunately, already fallen into a degree of disrepair once more. The hoped-for visitors never arrived in sufficient numbers to make rural tourism a viable economic prospect for villagers. Other rural tourism projects in northern Nicaragua have been more successful (cf. Zapata et al., 2011, for a review of such initiatives in Nicaragua). See also Chapter 7, which will discuss in more detail the hotel which was constructed as part of the same project.

²² The role of coffee capitalism in the economic and political history of Central America is a central theme in scholarly accounts of the 19th Century. In Nicaraguan studies, Charlip (2003) has notably

raising and coffee farming, they employed a small number of full-time staff, and maintained in addition, in most cases, a resident population of tenant labourers (*colonos*). Permanent staff included administrators (*mandadores*), and field supervisors (*capatás*). Interviewees recalled that while *mandadores*—who needed to be able to read and write in order to undertake the organisational work of the estate—were generally recruited by landlords from elsewhere in the country, the supervisors on the ground were normally ‘people from around here’ (*gente de aquí*). These local individuals had worked hard over the years, gained the trust and respect of estate owners, and had eventually been promoted to positions of responsibility and greater economic stability accordingly.

For those living as tenant farmers within the boundaries of haciendas, residence was generally contingent upon the regular clearing of woodland, which would be made available for subsistence agriculture for one, sometimes two years, at which point the land was required to be planted with animal feed and turned into pasture for the estates’ cattle (cf. Lyons, 2006). Tenants would then be allotted another parcel which would require clearing in turn, in order to plant the next year’s maize and beans, and so on. In other cases rent was charged by landlords in the form of a certain number of sacks of maize and beans, or a certain percentage of the total produce raised on allotted fields, frequently as much as half.²³

taken issue with Wheelock’s (1985) classic account of peasant dispossession and proletarianisation. As Charlip makes clear, historical understandings of this process have been highly politicised and have played directly into the form agrarian policy took during the 1980s. Jamie Wheelock, the author of a central historical reference on the topic, held the top job in the land reform agency for much of the revolutionary decade. Dore (2006) provides a rich accounts of the role of liberal thought in actively promoting the processes of land concentration and privatisation that facilitated the development of coffee haciendas. See Edelman (1992) for a political economy analysis of the development of large haciendas in Costa Rica. Scholars (Saldaña-Portillo, 2003) have documented the ways in which the assumptions about class structure implied by these theorisations of development led to particular agrarian policies. Cf. Revels (2000) for a concise overview.

²³ Unfortunately my own data does not indicate whether both of these requirements—paying crops as rent and the requirement to clear new land each year—were ever in place simultaneously in the haciendas of this area.

Additional labour required during harvest times was drawn from residents of the many small hamlets dotted across the mountains. It was in these surrounding villages that many of the families who eventually came to comprise the founding members of the Gualiqueme cooperative lived, and it was partly through such seasonal employment that the haciendas impinged upon their everyday lives. For while the majority of land in the region was, in the years immediately prior to the



Figure 6—The *beneficio* of the San Cristobal cooperative, constructed in order to take advantage of the surviving coffee patio from the old hacienda.

revolution, owned by the large estates, many peasant families did privately own land. Harvests often coincided, and families would not always wish to spare the labour to take advantage of the seasonal employment available in the haciendas. There were times, though, when they had no choice. Local outposts of the *Guardia Nacional* enforced a regime of compulsory employment which had been established by Zelaya's government in the 19th century (Thiesenhusen, 1995, p189). Santos Perez, a resident of the neighbouring community of San Cristobal, recalled that anyone

resident within hacienda territory who repeatedly refrained from turning up to work in the estate would be chased out of their homes by the *Guardia*.

The haciendas also served to an extent as centres of local commerce, at a time when access to towns was slow going, involving travel on foot along narrow tracks for those who didn't own a horse. Haciendas both purchased produce such as coffee from peasant farmers in order to sell it on through their own marketing channels, and they also provided peasants with products through estate-run shops. Tenant labourers would frequently accrue debts through the acquisition of material goods from such outlets, debts which would be required to be repaid through work within the hacienda; one strategy through which the estates attempted to secure their supply of labour.²⁴

The landowners of the area were men known personally to ordinary villagers and labourers, and the economic and labour ties described above were bound up with intimate everyday involvements. Many recollections, even among those who are committed to Sandinista constructions of the pre-revolutionary past as a time of exploitation and oppression, depict close and even affectionate involvements with landowners, referred to as either '*millionarios*' (millionaires) or '*ricos*' (rich people). Erwin Valdivio, for example, recounted an occurrence when his father needed to call on the assistance of Pedro Olivas. Erwin's father was a minor landowner in his own right, and Erwin stressed that his father already had gained the trust of don Pedro; he frequently borrowed small quantities of money in order to finance his own coffee cultivation—200, 300 *pesos*, say—and was known as someone who always repaid his debts (*un hombre pagador*). His own coffee farm was substantial enough to own his

²⁴ Cf. Thurner (1993), who discusses the debate within Latin American historiography regarding the extent to which haciendas were able to control their labour supply. Some accounts argue that such control was rather tenuous. Summarising one side of an ongoing debate in Andean history, Thurner comments that; 'All of these interpretations pointed to a singular conclusion: "The history of haciendas is therefore the history of how landlords attempted to get something out of the Indians who were occupying hacienda lands"' (p45, citation removed).

own depulping machine, but on one occasion when setting out to start work for the day, he found that the machine had been stolen.²⁵ With the coffee already picked, there was the risk that it would spoil unless processed quickly. Erwin's father went to don Pedro to ask for his assistance, and arrangements to borrow a machine were swiftly made. Use of these machines would generally incur a fee, but when Erwin's father asked don Pedro how much he owed him for the loan, 'the boss' (*el patrón*) reportedly waved the enquiry off. 'Look', he said, 'the coffee that you've been processing (*beneficiando*) you're going to deliver to me. So you don't owe me anything'. *Así era, el rico* (that's what he was like, that rich guy), commented Erwin.

On another occasion his father had been able to assist Carlos Garcia, another of the major local landlords mentioned above. Don Garcia had been involved in a minor crash in his automobile, and Erwin's father happened to be on the scene at the time, and had helped the landlord deal with the consequences of the accident.²⁶ Grateful, Carlos Garcia had stated that if ever Erwin's father was in need of *ocote*,²⁷

²⁵ Depulping is the first stage in the processing of coffee cherries, and is still frequently undertaken using hand-powered machines. The same machines can be powered by motors, and the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative operates a motor-driven *beneficio* (processing facility) within Gualiqueme, charging *socios* per bucket (*lata*) of coffee in order to sustain maintenance and staff costs. A few families in the village own their own machines, which are mostly operated by hand. Other families sometimes pay per *lata* of coffee depulped for the use of these machines. Members of the Sacuanjoche cooperative (to be discussed below) farming in Cerro Verde generally depulp their coffee using one of several *beneficios* that they have constructed in the mountain, with NGO assistance. Depulping is in all cases undertaken by Gualiqueme producers near to or within the village, prior to sale of coffee to second-level cooperatives or private buyers. The only exception to this is when coffee is sold 'green', prior to maturation, for a lower price. This occurs either on the final harvesting sweep (when mature and immature cherries are all picked together), or in years where there is concern that coffee may not ripen and will otherwise go to waste.

²⁶ Carlos Garcia was reportedly the first person in the municipality of Condega to own a motor vehicle

²⁷ *Ocote* is pine root rich in flammable sap which can be used as a torch. It is still heavily utilised by Gualiqueme residents, especially during the frequent power-cuts which interrupt the village electricity supply. A small piece of root is capable of burning for around 10-15 minutes, and so a supply of splinters cut from a larger root is capable of keeping a room lit through the evening hours. Prior to electrification this was the primary way of lighting houses after dusk, and in the darkness of early morning. Pieces of *ocote* are also frequently used in the morning as fire-lighters to get the hearth going. Residents of Gualiqueme exclusively find their *ocote* among the cooperative's pine forests. Urban Nicaraguans mostly purchase it, if they are unable to persuade a rural relative to keep them

he would be welcome to collect it from within the pine forests of the hacienda. And Erwin recalled that he and his father did indeed take up this offer. *Ocote* was hard to come by in those days, he recalled, and on that occasion they were able to forage without worrying, because they had the landlord's permission (...*buscando tranquilo porque anduvimos con el permiso de él*). Pointing as much to a quotidian need to forage and glean in hacienda-owned lands illicitly (cf. Scott, 1985, 1990), these recollections nonetheless indicate some of the ways in which personalised favours and reciprocities inflected everyday involvements with landowning elites.

Wages and exploitation

These examples should not be taken to imply that recollections of relations with the local landowning elites present a rosy picture in general, however. The Sandinista evaluation of pre-revolutionary social relations as having been oppressive and exploitative is very widely articulated and identified with among Gualiqueme residents, in particular in relation to the amount people used to be paid for their work on the large estates. Indeed, the absolute numerical difference in wages is perhaps the most frequently-referenced indicator in local narratives of the extent of past exploitation. The fact that a whole day's labour would formerly be paid with just a few *córdobas* (as compared to around eighty at the time of research) was continually cited as indicating the heartless brutality of an oppressive labour regime. On the one hand, it should be noted that enquiries into the real value of such apparently low wages frequently elicited commentaries about how a single *cordoba* in those days could buy an impressive list of items, while more recently money doesn't seem to last (*el dinero no rinde*). There appears to be a degree, then, in which the stark contrast provided by a reading of absolute wage difference with no regard for inflation plays into an imperative to construct the past as dramatically 'other'. On the

supplied. Villagers visiting town will therefore sometimes take a large *ocote* root for sale, if they have one spare, in order to offset the bus fare.

other, this dramatic numerical difference clearly serves as a useful indicator of a qualitative shift between times.

None of this should be taken to undermine the real sense among most of my informants that life had qualitatively improved since the times prior to the revolution. Accounts also emphasised the long days of labour that were required in order to obtain those meagre wages, and informants frequently recall being required to be present shortly after dawn, and to work until not long before dusk (i.e., approximately 6am—6pm). Although the purchasing power of rural day labourers in post-revolutionary Nicaragua may not be quite so dramatically different to those of their pre-revolutionary counterparts as some local accounts imply, it is only on rare occasions now that people now work such lengthy hours.²⁸

Devil pacts and local understandings of wealth

Nor should it be assumed that access to the favours of local elites was something consistently desired by *campesinos*. The rich were viewed as a source of danger as much as possibility or opportunity. As is frequently the case throughout rural Latin America, the extreme wealth of *hacendados* was often construed as being primarily a product of diabolic pacts (Edelman, 1994; Jansen and Roquas, 2002; Nash, 1979; Taussig, 1980). A particularly striking image informed such understandings in the

²⁸ One key activity which did consistently demand working days over ten hours was the process of dehusking beans after they have been harvested; an activity which requires completion within a short period to prevent damage to the crop, and also to guard against a risk of theft from the fields. Day labourers (*mozos*) employed to carry out this task expected a proportionally higher wage than is standard, however; 100-120 *córdobas*, say, as opposed to the 80 *córdobas* frequently paid for less demanding jobs. But many of those working their own lands will periodically undertake long days for relatively short parts of the year in order to get the time-consuming tasks of planting or harvesting done at optimal times. The timing of many such tasks is guided by readings of the moon's position, with the stage of lunar cycle understood by many to have determinative effects on the likely outcome of agricultural endeavours. Consequently, there may be a narrow window in which to perform certain tasks in opportune conditions. Villagers will often, for example, rush to try and complete their planting of maize and beans while a young moon is in the sky, and will therefore work without rest until the task is completed.

region surrounding Gualiqueme. 'The rich' (*los ricos*) are often depicted as having kept monstrous, invisible snakes, the care of which served to mediate their binding agreements with the devil. Known as *mukwana*, these snakes were understood to concretely facilitate the acquisition of wealth through the 'delivery' of souls. The *rico* would feed the snake people who they had managed to entice into their homes, and the snake would in exchange excrete either gold or currency.²⁹

This potentially mortal danger of overly close association with wealthy individuals—although clearly not functioning to simply prohibit contact with elites—was in some cases keenly felt. I was familiar with a woman in Gualiqueme who, as the illegitimate daughter (*hija natural*) of a wealthy and politically-powerful Somocista, was offered a degree of financial assistance by her biological father. While some of her half-siblings, also illegitimate, accepted such offers and thereby received a formal education in a time when such privileges were very scarcely accessible to ordinary *campesinos*, she was open about the fact that she had been too scared to trust the offers of support. She therefore remained illiterate while some of her siblings progressed to professional employment, but there was no doubt in her mind that her father's wealth was diabolically-acquired, and she preferred not to run the risk of finding herself 'delivered' (*entregado*).

²⁹ It is notable that some people speculated about what had happened to these *mukwana* in the aftermath of the revolution's disruptions. With wealthy landlords in many cases fleeing the country and abandoning their lands with the outbreak of revolutionary violence, it occurred to some to wonder whether the snakes had remained untended by their masters, or whether they had also left. The idea that certain tragic events in post-revolutionary times may have been caused by such creatures, abandoned and on the loose in the post-revolutionary context, was something I heard articulated on a very few occasions. However, such ideas did not appear to have been particularly elaborated or widely adopted, and certainly didn't appear to comprise a consistently-employed mode of evaluating post-revolutionary experiences.

Guerrillas and collaborators

From the mid-1970s, cadres of FSLN guerrillas began to establish encampments in the relatively remote mountains of the area. Militant recruits, in many cases



Figure 7—An FSLN membership document showing the holder to be a ‘militant’.

university students who had become involved in the FSLN in the cities, spent formative years of revolutionary training living in clandestine camps throughout Nicaragua, aiming to foment networks of support among rural populations and prepare the countryside for an eventual military uprising.³⁰ One such camp was in fact located within the land that was later granted to the Gualiqueme cooperative.³¹

³⁰ Existing scholarship makes clear that priorities within the FSLN were divided between a number of different 'tendencies', each of which placed differing emphasis on the prospects for revolutionary support to arise in the countryside.

³¹ Omar Cabezas (1990) wrote a compelling account of his own experiences living in such camps, in which he mentions a visit to the Gualiqueme area. The rural tourism project already mentioned

Once Sandinista networks were being actively sought out and investigated by the *Guardia Nacional*, residents recall the atmosphere of everyday life becoming increasingly tense and restrictive. Anything capable of arousing the vaguest suspicion might lead to being interrogated by the patrolling military. For example, don Edmundo recalled being spotted by a *Guardia* as he crossed a barb-wire fence in a location where no established footpath crossed. He was immediately called up and questioned on the spot. Such moments were especially tense for those who, like Edmundo, *were* in fact involved in clandestine activities. Although he clearly remembered that the occasion in question was entirely innocent—simply a shortcut taken for convenience—he had by that time been recruited into assisting the guerrillas, serving as part of the covert postal network which kept the encampment in touch with militants elsewhere in the country.

Revolutionary ‘Triumph’ and turmoil

As has already been stated, the majority of future founding members of the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative lived at the time of the revolution in number of villages scattered through the mountainous region. With the success of the Sandinistas’ final insurrection in 1979, the initial months and years of the revolutionary governments’ administration saw substantial changes in the lives of villagers. New institutional forms were established, with the FSLN soon organising local Sandinista Defence Committees (*las Comités de Defensa Sandinista*). Political meetings became frequent, credit and savings cooperatives were established, and many villagers became members of mass organisations such as the ATC. Indeed, those accounts which made reference to it at all depicted this initial phase of the revolutionary years as a time of considerable change.

involved attempting to turn this site into an attraction, and the occasional groups of Managua university students who visit the community are taken up to visit this camp by Gualiqueme residents trained as tour guides. The route to the camp site is very infrequently travelled, however, and at the time of research remained heavily overgrown.

These brief years of relatively peaceful social experiment and reorganisation appear to have been largely engulfed in local narratives, however, by recollections of what came afterwards. Indeed, this brief phase of political history was rarely emphasised; villagers conflated their depiction of the Somocista ‘Guardia’ and the ‘Contras’, and in doing so cultivated a strong sense of historical continuity between these distinct phases of violence; with the briefly peaceful interlude obfuscated. For it was not long before the consequences of political discontent among some alienated

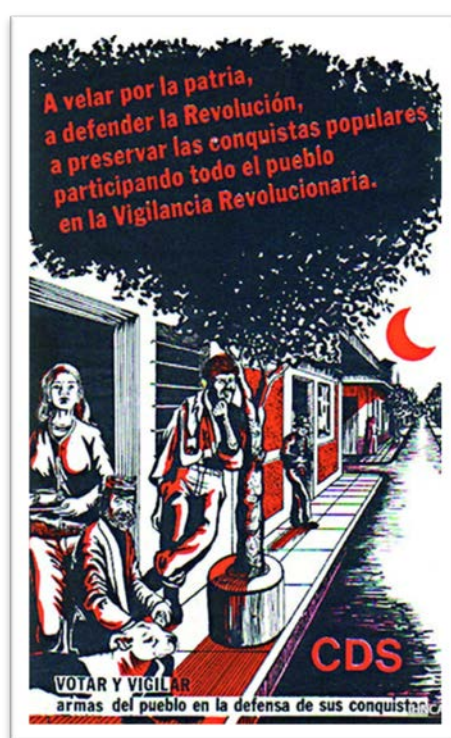


Figure 8—Sandinista Defence Committee poster. Image copyright: IHNCA

rural sectors—fuelled by the increasingly active intervention of the US—began to be felt across northern Nicaragua. Counter-revolutionary forces began undertaking attacks on villages, kidnaps, and destruction of animals and crops, aiming to undermine rural bases of support for the FSLN (Horton, 1998). The three principal villages of origin of Gualiqueme founders—La Pita, El Arenal and El Jiguero—were in each case understood by Contra forces to have comprised centres of support for

the FSLN before the revolution, and to have retained ties of support in the post-revolutionary period. Consequently, each of the villages was specifically targeted for attack. La Pita and El Jiguero were both set ablaze, on different occasions, with villagers fleeing for their lives and eventually seeking refuge in the town of Condega. And after a number of *campesinos* had been kidnapped from their fields surrounding El Arenal, residents of that village were persuaded by municipal officials to evacuate also. The displaced populations of these villages comprised the founding *socios* of the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative.

Early years of the cooperative

In the years immediately following the revolutionary ‘Triumph’, the lands that later became Gualiqueme were operated by the Nicaraguan Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA) as a state farm. A few of the later *socios* of Rigoberto Cruz cooperative,³² those who remained living in the nearby areas, worked as employees of this organisation. It has been well documented that Sandinista agrarian policy gradually shifted over the course of their time in power, in part in the light of the gathering momentum of the counter-revolution (Martí i Puig, 2001). While such shifts eventually led to a policy of distributing land to individual peasant families, the early aim to industrialise rural production through the creation of state farms initially gave way to the creation of large-scale cooperatives. In the context of the civil war, establishing such cooperatives was also taken to have military value; the creation of armed concentrations of politically-loyal rural populations (Baumeister, 1985; Deere, Marchetti and Reinhardt, 1985; Dore, 1989; Enriquez, 1991; Martinez, 1993; Thiesenhusen, 1989). In the context of the population displacements discussed above—and with many displaced villagers still being housed in emergency shelter—

³² Note that I sometimes refer to the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative as the ‘Gualiqueme cooperative’, in line with local usage. Gualiqueme is the village, and Rigoberto Cruz is the name of the cooperative, but at the point of the cooperative’s foundation, village and cooperative were inseparable, since the village was constructed in order to house cooperative members.

the formation of new, militarised settlements (*asentamientos*) appeared to offer the prospect of meeting a number of key priorities simultaneously.

As an Agricultural Defence Cooperative (*Cooperativa Agrícola de Defensa*, or CAD)—one of the militarised forms of production cooperative (*Cooperativa Agrícola Sandinista*, or CAS) established along the Northern war fronts (Marti i Puig, 2001)—all land, labour and inputs in the cooperative were initially organised collectively. Villagers' recollections of these years in the mid-1980s focus primarily on the violence and insecurity of the increasingly-disruptive war, however, and the details of labour arrangements tend to slip into the background. Villagers recollect that work in the fields had to be undertaken with guns slung round the shoulder, ever vigilant in case patrolling perimeter guards alerted them to the approach of Contra forces. There were times when much of the field labour conventionally performed by men was undertaken by female work teams, as most men had either been conscripted into the army, or were serving as guards in the hilltop outposts surrounding the cooperative. A large building was in fact constructed within the community in later years of the revolutionary decade, intended to house a state-operated day-care centre, in order to facilitate the continued mobilisation of women's labour, although this never became operational.³³

On a number of occasions the cooperative found itself the target of raids by Resistance forces, attacks which were in each case repelled by the armed *socios*,³⁴ but not without a number of casualties being suffered among cooperative members.

³³ The building remained unused until being converted into a hotel by a rural tourism NGO project. See Chapter 7 for more details.

³⁴ Contra military strategy shifted over the years of conflict, but a continual theme was the effort to disrupt perceived foundations of economic strength of the Sandinista government. In the coffee-growing regions, this strategy initially comprised terror campaigns involving direct attacks on coffee producers, aiming to cut off production at its base. Later years saw alterations in strategy as efforts to harness a wider base of peasant support shifted targets towards focal points further up the distribution chain, such as state-operated processing plants. Cooperatives were widely perceived as being both sources of revenue for the state, as well as being symbolic foci of the revolutionary project, which led to their frequently being targeted in raids across the north of Nicaragua (Marti i Puig, 2001).

Underground shelters had been constructed within the village where women and children, following routines that had been drilled in preparation, rushed to hide at any sign of an imminent attack.

While villagers are in most cases keen to depict the revolution as a beneficial transition, a parallel, overlapping evaluative periodisation marks the shift from violence to peace. The time since the end of the war is heavily distinguished from this recent period of civil war and unrest (as will be seen, this unrest continued beyond the formal end of the 'Contra' war in 1990), and villagers are unanimously appreciative in their narratives of the value of stability and peace. Innumerable times I was told how it was not long ago that people couldn't safely stray beyond the boundaries of the community. Travel to town was fraught with risks and was avoided if possible. The real fear of kidnap and murder by Resistance forces instilled any necessary trips beyond the patrolled perimeter of the village with intense insecurity. Nicaraguan Spanish employs the prefix *afinado* when speaking of the deceased, and recollections of wartime would on occasion shift into a litany of the names of the dead—*afinado* Danilo Espinales, *afinado* Cristobal Reyes, *afinado* Eugenio Barrera—accompanied by accounts of where exactly they were ambushed and killed.

Indeed, it should be noted that despite Gualiqueme residents frequently constructing accounts which reflect a mainstream Sandinista historical narrative—in general being concerned to articulate a strong support of the Sandinistas that continued throughout the years of revolution and war—at other moments a rather distinct image is conjured, much closer to what Rene Mendoza (1990) depicts as a broad *campesino* perception throughout rural Nicaragua of the two sides (*los dos bandos*), the Sandinistas and the 'Liberals',³⁵ as equally perilous and threatening

³⁵ 'Liberals', '*Guardia*' and 'Contra' are used synonymously in local accounts in such a way that distinctions between these groups and the historical moments they are conventionally associated with, in the case of the pre-revolutionary '*guardia*' and the post-revolutionary 'Contra', are elided. Similarly,

powers (cf. also Horton, 1998, p183; Martí i Puig, 2001). Mendoza understands rural support for the counter-revolution to have been in many cases a product of this sense of simply having no choice but to pick sides. Indeed, there were moments when the accounts of Gualiqueme residents regarding the periods of turbulence contained a strong sense of powerlessness, a poignant impression of being helplessly caught between warring factions, forced to align with one side or the other in order to secure a degree of security. Accounts sometimes point to Sandinista brutality and violence as well as stressing the atrocities of the Contras, and in such moments a sense emerges of rural people as having been caught up in the crossfire of an alien conflict forced upon them. Paulino Morales, for example, speaking of how much everyone suffered during the war, stated that both sides were as bad as each other, and that if one of them didn't get you, the other would. He recollected an occasion when EPS (*Ejército Popular Sandinista*, the Sandinista army) recruiters turned up in the village looking to round up conscripts; all the youths fled, he said, but one was caught, tied up and thrown into the back of their truck. That's what they did, he insisted, they tied you up and took you off, and then you had to go through six months of training and then be sent off to die in the *monte*.³⁶ On another occasion Esperanza bitterly recalled the killings of villagers accused by the FSLN of treachery in the immediate aftermath of the revolution. EPS soldiers turned up in her village soon after the 'Triumph' with lists of names of individuals denounced as informers for the Guardia, conducting summary executions. Despite her stated allegiance to the FSLN, Esperanza's narrative depicted these accused 'traitors' as innocent victims, presenting Sandinista forces as dangerous outsiders.

such slippages obfuscate any distinction between the various Liberal political parties and these military groups.

³⁶ Paulino's language here is revealing. Eschewing the standard, heroicising language deployed in Sandinista discourse of 'martyrs' who have 'fallen' gloriously in the 'mountains', using the term *monte* instead—generally used to denote the uncultivated, wild or overgrown scrubland of the countryside—implies an uncivilised, anti-social death.

Post-1990 experiences of violence

1990 saw the electoral defeat of the FSLN by a coalition of opposition groups who, with US backing, had been able to offer an end to the civil war. In the years following the official ceasefire which brought an end to the civil war, however, various groups either remained armed, or rearmed themselves in response to political frustrations, particularly in relation to disappointed government promises to distribute land grants to demobilised soldiers from both sides of the conflict (Close, 1999; Rocha, 2001). This unrest affected the community of Gualiqueme directly when a group of re-armed soldiers, operating under the leadership of a Contra commander operating under the appellation 'the indomitable' (*el Indomable*), occupied the village briefly, searching for hidden caches of weapons that the villagers were rumoured to still possess. Official policy was that all of the weaponry which had previously been issued to cooperative members was to have been destroyed, and villagers recall when Sandinista officials arrived to oversee the collection and removal of their arms.

El Indomable and his men were persuaded, however, that substantial supplies of weaponry were potentially still possessed by cooperative members, and shortly after arrival in the village they conducted a full search of all houses. They found only a single firearm, belonging to the president of the cooperative, along with a few insignificant personal stores of old ammunition, and continued on to a neighbouring cooperative. The search had clearly been tense, however, and traumatic. One informant stated that a village resident, Felix Ruiz, had been on the verge of being executed by one group of Resistance soldiers who suspected him of deceiving them regarding hidden weapons, when *el Indomable* arrived and ordered his men to let Felix live.

Gualiqueme residents at times describe the brief occupation as having been primarily a test of the post-1990 situation of peace by *el Indomable*, an effort to verify whether or not cooperative members really had disarmed, and if it was really the case

that a ceasefire had been agreed and was being respected by Sandinista elements. The community had been surrounded by artillery, Erwin recalled, positioned up in the hills overlooking the residential area, ready to open fire at a moment's notice if anyone showed any sign of resistance. But nobody in Gualiqueme had any intention of doing so, Erwin stated, and the encounter passed without casualties.

Such was not the case when the group arrived in the adjacent cooperative of San Cristobal. There, residents who had been alerted to the presence of the Contra forces had excavated some weapons that they had indeed hidden in the mountains, and met the approaching troops with gunfire. One of *Indomable's* men was injured, and the resulting forceful search of the village led to the death of one of the village residents, and the serious injury of another, wounded by a gunshot. This was the final experience of militarised violence for residents of Gualiqueme. No further irregular militants came near the village, and narratives present the time since these events as one of peace.

Land reform in the post-Sandinista period: the Sacuanjoche Cooperative

The Sacuanjoche cooperative is a significant local presence for Gualiqueme villagers, and given the substantial role it plays in local lives, it is important to provide a brief account of its emergence and place in relation to the community. The cooperative is also the product of Nicaragua's second major phase of land reform, that of the post-1990 period and attending to its formation thus helps to indicate the importance of continuing processes of land distribution beyond the revolutionary period (Close, 1999; Jonakin, 1997). The account I provide here is taken largely from the narrative of one of the cooperative's key members, Jose Oliver, and it thus combines biographical elements with the story of the cooperative's foundation and development.

Jose Oliver had left the army somewhat abruptly, feeling compelled to leave after becoming embroiled in a personal conflict with a superior officer. This sudden departure meant that he left without proper discharge papers, and his status and entitlements in the post-war situation therefore remained somewhat ambiguous. He didn't have the documentation to demonstrate his status as a retiree of the army. As is well-known, a central element of Violeta de Chamorro's campaign for the 1990 election was her stated commitment to demobilise the militaries of both parties to the civil war, and provide them with economic prospects through distributions of land.³⁷ Jose became one of the many Nicaraguans who felt that this promise had not been met, and that he was owed land that he hadn't received. Having failed to be granted a military pension of any kind, he joined with a number of other ex-military men in the same situation in order to agitate for recognition of their situation. The leader of this organisation was Raul Gamez who, at the beginning of the period of research, was serving a term as president of the Sacuanjoche cooperative. Through pulling strings with contacts inside and outside of the military, the group eventually managed to negotiate the allocation of a parcel of land to divide between them, amounting to approximately fifteen *manzanas* each.³⁸

³⁷ Indeed, the literature makes clear that *more* land was redistributed under Chamorro's administration in the early 1990s than had been distributed as part of the Sandinista's land reform program during the 1980s (Close, 1999; Jonakin, 1997). In most cases this land was made up out of the remaining state-held land that had been intended by the Sandinista government for eventual redistribution.

³⁸ Jose Oliver considered himself to actually have about 10 *manzanas* in his possession, as a consequence of various boundary shifts that had (illegitimately) occurred. Note that the *manzana* is the prevailing unit of measurement of land area in Nicaragua. 1 *manzana* is equivalent to 1.7 acres (Jonakin, 1996)

This land was located adjacent to the title granted to the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative, in a high altitude area known locally as Cerro Verde. The land had been in the hands of a state farm since the revolution—having previously been property of the substantial landowner Orlando Ramos³⁹—but the part granted to the group of *retirados* had remained uncultivated throughout the 1980s, relegated to an



Figure 9—Members of the Sacuanjoche cooperative operate a motor-powered coffee mill.

abandoned no-man’s land amid the violence of the civil war. The men who had been granted this area of land in Cerro Verde were in some cases urbanites entirely uninterested in moving to the area and cultivating the land themselves. Some of them immediately set about trying to sell their allocated plots to other members of the group or to locals interested in expanding their holdings. Jose Oliver had no

³⁹ At the height of his economic power, as Jose Oliver recounted, Orlando Ramos had come to own over 600,000 *manzanas* of land across Nicaragua, all of which became property of the state and part of the APP (*Área de Propiedad del Pueblo*, or People’s Property Area) with Ramos having fled the country.

previous experience working in agriculture—having been involved in the FSLN since his teenage years, first as an urban militant, and later in the military—but he intended to give it a try. Initially, though, he left the land unworked, intending to first build up a bit of capital to invest by working a job in Managua for a few years. However, a tip-off that neighbouring proprietors may have been making incursions into his property spurred him to take up residence nearer the site, and to begin working the land himself in order to guarantee its protection.

Shortly after having received the initial grant, the group—with membership altered slightly as a result of some of the land sales that had occurred; some leaving, some joining—decided to establish themselves legally as a cooperative. This was understood to be a crucial move for the purpose of applying for loans and organisational support, and eventually for marketing their produce. With the later assistance of CIPRES—a national rural development organisation with a strong commitment to cooperatives—Sacuanjoche developed over the years into a substantial and reasonably effective business.

In a variety of ways the proximity of the Sacuanjoche cooperative has impacted on Gualiqueme residents. All of the founding *socios* of Sacuanjoche who remain farming their allocated lands are relatively substantial producers, and during peak seasons coffee-picking for their farms stands as one of the principal sources of local employment. A few of the Sacuanjoche *socios*—already relatively prosperous farmers—have expanded their original land grants, in one case employing a considerable permanent staff. The cooperative has also become involved with the purchase and sale of coffee, and therefore stands as one of a relatively small number of options for Gualiqueme residents looking to sell their own produce. During the months of harvest, Sacuanjoche operates a purchasing station (*estación de acopio*), renting the front room of a centrally-located house within the village. The organisation also acts as an intermediary for a number of NGOs who have undertaken social projects of different kinds among Gualiqueme residents. For

example, during the time of research the NGO Fundación del Norte undertook a micro-credit project intended to finance investment in small coffee plots, with initial loans meant to be repaid through the delivery of harvested coffee, with the local administration of the project undertaken by the president of Sacuanjoche Cooperative. Because of this role, the cooperative stands as a crucial element in the institutional context of assistentialist projects which plays a central role in local political life; a theme to be explored fully in Chapter 6.

‘Not really a cooperative’

In the years since 1990, the great majority of the formerly collective land held by the Gualiqueme cooperative has been informally divided up among members, a complex process which will be explored fully in the following chapter. But a brief indication of the present situation can be provided by relaying an evaluation of the Gualiqueme cooperative’s trajectory provided by Jose Oliver. The cooperative there, he insists, basically doesn’t function as a cooperative at all anymore. He paints the history of the zone as one of tragically squandered potential. The resources that were initially granted to the cooperative, he points out, were enviable. Even the pine forest alone, if well managed, he insisted should have been sufficient to guarantee a decent income for the cooperative members. But as he understands it, the cooperative was abandoned by the government. After an initial period when INRA was intimately involved in the management of the organisation—providing careful technical assistance and supporting the new *cooperativistas* in their institutional development—such state support was suddenly and catastrophically withdrawn with the electoral defeat of the FSLN in 1990. The villagers were then left on their own to manage a complex agricultural organisation, and, as Jose Oliver understands it, were simply insufficiently competent or experienced in the relevant areas of expertise. Bankruptcy and dissolution as an organisation, he surmises, came as a result.

In some ways, Jose Oliver's analysis is persuasive. One primary function of the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative for Gualiqueme *socios* in the present day is as a means to gain access to the second-level exporting and marketing cooperative PRODECOOP, in order for individual members to be able to sell their coffee, produced on personal plots, through this channel. Rigoberto Cruz meetings are by no means regular. While the cooperative of the neighbouring village of San Nicolás, for example, holds a general assembly once a month, and the Sacuanjoche cooperative holds constant weekly meetings and runs a full-time office with a permanent staff, the cooperative in Gualiqueme meets very infrequently, generally in response to some pressing need. However, as will become clear in Chapter 4, membership in the cooperative remains crucially valued by Gualiqueme residents, and that chapter will bring the narrative of the cooperative's institutional development up to the present day.

Part 2: Assistance and progress in Gualiqueme history

In this part of the chapter I wish to illustrate ways in which narratives of the community's creation and development revolve around ideas of assistance, with accounts weaving together a sense that crucial transformations have been effected by the interventions of outside powers. Such interventions are frequently personalised, framed as the transformative acts of particular individuals. These ideas, I suggest, play into a rural Central American worldview within which intentional agencies of different kinds are taken as the motive forces underlying change, in accordance with Foster's (1988) classic characterisation of a perspective from which 'volition, rather than the dynamics of property, form and relationships is seen as prevailing in the universe' (p118). Assistance, then—which later chapters will explore as a crucial theme informing ongoing local involvements an institutional context of state and NGO projects (see Chapter 6)—emerges as a key concern inflecting local historicity. Through the performance of these narratives, Gualiqueme residents work to

construe significant change as a product of notable acts of help, with specific interventions of powerful personalities moving history itself along.

The founding of the community through the governmental allocation of land inaugurates this series of interventions. This foundational land grant can perhaps be seen to stand as a paradigmatic distributive transformation, one which provides a model against which other notable developments are evaluated and understood. The allocation and delivery of land—which in local accounts is frequently attributed to the personalised political agency of Daniel Ortega—is presented as formative of a novel political identity. Indeed, for many Gualiqueme residents, it is this act of governmental distribution which is understood to have established a relation of binding political loyalty between themselves and the Sandinista party. As will be seen in the subsequent chapter, efforts to establish and validate entitlements of different kinds within the cooperative crucially revolve around this sense that a foundational social accord was entered into with the Sandinista party, with the delivery of land taken to be one part of an enduring and reciprocal implicit contract.

As this theme tends to frequently emerge amid recollections of infrastructural developments, this part of the chapter will also enable an account of the gradual material development of the community to be presented. Projects undertaken by NGOs—and associated by residents with particular individuals who held leadership roles in those organisations and became familiar names to residents—have enabled many of the most significant of these works. These have transformed the village from a makeshift refugee camp into a ‘proper village’ (*un mero pueblo*) with houses, roads,



Figure 10—Members of a local liberation theology group stand in front of an FSLN campaign poster

a system of running water and electricity. And from one perspective, then, this local emphasis on assistance simply reflects the institutional and economic reality of the way in which the community’s significant developments have been brought about. Development of this theme in later chapters will make clear, however, that these elements of the local construction of history resonate closely with a broader construction of social efficacy in which efforts to guarantee appropriate assistance comprise the focal point of a range of practices.

‘He is our government’: Daniel and the gift of land

Recollections of early involvements with the guerrillas who were stationed in clandestine encampments in the surrounding mountains invariably make reference to the fact that the promise of land was a primary strategy for recruiting rural support, and, indeed, a key motivation for granting such support (cf. Saldaña-Portillo, 1997, pp138-9). The point of the revolution, FSLN agitators stated to potential recruits, was to return land construed as having been historically expropriated from peasant communities to peasant producers themselves.⁴⁰ The strategies of expansion of one of the local *hacendados* in particular was taken as paradigmatic of a broad historical process with general relevance for Nicaragua. Diego Garcia’s substantial estate was understood to have reached its considerable size largely through a process of embargoing privately-held peasant and indigenous lands in order to recoup unrepaid loans, loans extended largely with this explicit purpose in mind. This image of a landlord’s insatiable greed and a business practice founded on exploiting the economic vulnerability of rural populations prevails both in scholarly and administrative depictions of the area,⁴¹ as well as in a contemporary popular understanding heavily inflected by Sandinista discursive tropes. And that initiatory promise that the land be *returned* to the peasantry is presented in many local accounts as having indeed been fulfilled with the creation of the cooperative, and through the delivery of the legal title of the cooperative’s land grant.⁴²

Crucial here is the way this—for Gualiqueme residents—inaugural, foundational distributive act of the Sandinista state both tapped into and

⁴⁰ Cf. Wheelock Román’s (1975, 1985) influential account of the history of coffee-producing regions in Northern Nicaragua, which heavily informed the historical basis of FSLN theory and practice. See also the critical debate this account has generated more recently (Charlip, 1999, 2003).

⁴¹ As already indicated, I refrain from citing such materials directly in order to preserve geographical anonymity.

⁴² As Chapter 4 will make clear, the extent to which residents consider this process to have been completed varies considerably, and some argue that only with the delivery of *individual* legal title will the initial promise finally have been completed.

transformed logics of distribution, assistance and hierarchical involvement long prevailing in rural areas. Access to land had long been in many areas contingent upon the will of the relevant figure of power in the area, the landlord capable of granting permission to reside. Such relations of involved dependency with significant figures of power wind through rural political assumptions, and it is notable that this founding act of the state is generally presented in terms of a commitment fulfilled by ‘Daniel’, rather than some impersonal ‘government’. Doña Esperanza’s comment, when recounting these events, that Daniel Ortega ‘is our government’ (*él es el gobierno de nosotros*), captures this sense in which personalised presidential agency is characterised as a motive force underpinning historical process and development. Narratives of the community’s formation thus situate its original emergence as having been contingent upon a decision of ‘Daniel’ to ‘help’ and support people in pressing need.

Diego Quintero and the creation of the cooperative

Diego Quintero was the founding president of the cooperative, a member of the only family among the founding *socios* to have been resident within the cooperative’s land prior to the revolution. He was in fact the illegitimate son (*hijo natural*) of Carlos Garcia, one of the large landowners of before the revolution mentioned previously. During the years prior to 1979, the private residence of the Quintero family—situated on a tract of land that don Carlos had ceded them from his estate properties—had been one of the very few buildings in the area. Diego Quintero had operated a small shop from the residence, and *campesinos* travelling from remote mountain communities to and from town would stop there to pick up supplies. Quintero was thus well-known to residents of the various villages of origin of founding Rigoberto Cruz members. With the clandestine FLSN encampment established in the mountains nearby, Diego Quintero at some point was recruited into the network of collaborators assisting the guerrillas, and the house came to

operate as a 'base house', or *casa de base* (cf. Cabezas, 1990, for a vivid account of these ties between key rural households and guerilla groups). Diego's close involvement with the Sandinistas continued into the post-revolutionary period, and he was consequently selected to serve as the founding president of the cooperative. But it is the way this leadership plays into narratives of the cooperative's formation that I would like to emphasise here. Residents' accounts refer to Diego having 'brought us' to the area, placing a foundational impetus upon his personal capacity to gather the founding members. Erwin Valdivio, for example, spoke of the fact that when Contra attacks were increasing, there were still people who lived far from centres of population (*lejos de las comunidades*), and Diego Quintero, already president of the cooperative, went out personally to 'conquer' (*conquistar*) those people, to recruit them into membership the cooperative and bring them to safety. He describes his own family, after having been 'conquered' by Quintero, being brought along to the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative in a trailer. Rather than state decree or impersonal process, the operations which brought the cooperative into being are cast as an outcome of Diego's social capacities, and were founded upon his extensive ties of commerce and sociality in the local area prior to the revolution.

With the establishment of the cooperative, the Quintero family retained private ownership of their land within the former estate of Carlos Garcia. Owning this area of land was unique among founding members of the Gualiqueme cooperative; no other family possessed land outside of cooperative entitlements so close at hand.⁴³ The family house is also the only building in the area which survives from prior to the revolution. All of the hacienda buildings ended up being destroyed

⁴³ A few other families did retain possession of private lands in more distant areas. In some cases, the civil war throughout the 1980s made these lands inaccessible and unusable for productive purposes, prompting some such individuals to sell lands at well below the market value of the time (on 'distress sales' in rural Nicaragua, cf., Jonakin, 1996; Ruben and Masset, 2003). The great majority of lands that had been owned by founding Gualiqueme members prior to the revolution were lost in this way, or were abandoned in the violence of the conflict without hope of regaining possession. In a small number of instances, however, ownership was retained over the years.

over the course of a series of incursions by Contra forces—some were also destroyed by Sandinista troops during the revolutionary insurrection—leaving the Quintero residence as the sole surviving edifice that existed prior to 1979.

It was this structure that served as one of the two buildings which housed founding cooperative members *en masse* when they first moved to the area. For a number of months, founding families lived all together in these buildings; food was cooked collectively by women selected to perform this role as their work as cooperative members. Clothes were likewise washed collectively. Such conditions were by no means considered ideal, and families looked forward to the opportunity to establish individual residences. This possibility was enabled by the intervention of an NGO known as the Escuela Radiophonica Nicaragua, and narratives of the further development of the community place great emphasis upon the role of ‘organisations’ (*organismos*).

Padre Bonifacio and the construction of the village

Residents’ accounts of the early days of the community almost unanimously make reference to the fact that initially there were no roads or houses on the village site, as there are today. The area that now comprises the central residential sector was, when most founding cooperative members first arrived in the zone, ‘pure scrubland’ (*puro monte*), uncultivated and overgrown. After that initial period during which early residents were housed collectively, cooperative members were able to establish independent residences only through the assistance provided to them by an NGO, the Escuela Radiofónica de Nicaragua. Under the direction of a priest, Padre Bonifacio, who became a familiar figure to older residents of Gualiqueme, this organisation initially provided just roofing panels. Makeshift walls were cobbled together out of available materials in order to provide shelter until a later project carried out by the same organisation provided these houses with adobe-concrete walls. At the time of research the surviving structures from this initial development

comprised about half of the total houses in the villages, with later, individually-constructed buildings having been made almost exclusively of adobe.⁴⁴ Again, the assistance of Padre Bonifacio serves as a focal element of these narratives; it is *he* that 'built' the houses, and the emergence of a true village on the site of the cooperative's land is narratively constructed as the outcome of his willingness to provide assistance.

San Miguel and the installation of the water system

A number of other major infrastructural works took place over the years—in particular road construction and electrification—but during the time of research, perhaps due to the incumbent administration's discursive and legal emphasis on rights to water supply, it was water which was most highlighted in local commentary.⁴⁵ The construction of a system of water collection and distribution in the early years of the 1990s was facilitated by an NGO project which involved the whole community in undertaking the heavy labour required to build the reservoirs and install the piping. At a certain point during the construction process, however, the whole endeavour appeared jeopardised by the failure of water to appear in the large trench that had been dug by the mobilised residents, in which a concrete collection tank was to have been installed. It seemed possible that the calculations of the engineers (*técnicos*) who had drawn up the initial plans may have been in error,

⁴⁴ Abode construction techniques were taught to villagers after the cooperative's formation by an NGO. Prior to that, wattle and daub walling methods, supplemented with thatch roofing, had been the principle economical method of construction available to rural people in the area unable to afford the clay bricks of more prosperous residences.

⁴⁵ The creation of 'Water Committees' (*comites de agua*) has been a major organisational policy of the recent Sandinista administrations. Each community has been required to elect representatives to serve in such organisations, which are intended to monitor and guarantee, in accordance with ideals of 'participatory democracy', rights to water as set out in the recently-passed 'water law' (cf. Kreimann, 2011, for an analysis of *Comites de Agua*). In the case of Gualiqueme a number of representatives were indeed selected, and played a role in an NGO project to improve the water supply that was underway at the time of research.

and there was a period during which there was concern that the project would be a failure.

However, a group of Gualiqueme residents decided to seek saintly assistance in order to resolve the dilemma. It had not long previously been decided to adopt San Miguel as the patron saint of the community, taking on the saint's day fiesta on 20th September as an annual village celebration. It was suggested that a *promesa* (a votive agreement) be made with San Miguel requesting that water be made to appear



Figure 11—View of Gualiqueme. Visible to the right is one of the original houses built with the assistance of the Escuela Radiofónica de Nicaragua. It has been refurbished with roofing panels acquired from *Plan Techo*.

in the trench. Going ahead with the plan, villagers held a devotional procession from the church, proceeding up to the mountain site of the construction works, where prayers and songs were offered to the saint. Although the continuing process of conversion to Evangelical Christianity in years since makes this an increasingly controversial and contended perspective, water did indeed appear in the trench after the *promesa* had been made, and many residents consequently attribute the eventual

success of the system's installation to the intercession of San Miguel. In fulfilment of the *promesa*, Catholic congregants continue to make an annual procession to the water system's concrete reservoir, some way up the mountain.

The project provided most of the then-existing houses with individual taps. Many of the more recently-constructed adobe houses in the village, however, especially those on peripheral areas away from the original residential site, remain unconnected to the system. Residents of such dwellings are generally reliant upon daily visits to family members living in older houses, bringing back the day's supplies in plastic containers by hand or on horseback. At the time of research, running water was available during the rainy season for a period of between thirty to sixty minutes every other morning, with the supply alternating each day between two sectors of the village. During the dry season, the amount available sometimes dwindled, with the available supply lowering at times to ten minutes every other day. During such periods of scarcity women struggled to wash clothes, and sometimes had to make use of the water in the old hacienda lake, or travel to the nearest streams in order to perform domestic duties.

This series of acts of infrastructural assistance contribute towards a sense that the emergence and development of the community has been contingent upon the possibilities opened up by powerful help of different kinds. It is notable here that many narratives refer to Ortega's more recent social projects as if they were part of a series of interrelated steps that began with the Escuela Radiofonica's provision of houses and continue through to the present day, all of which have been enabled by 'Daniel's' inaugural distribution of cooperative land. In other words, these recent social projects are narratively placed in a succession of interventions which implies that history itself is coterminous with the capacity of powerful agents to enact key transformative possibilities. These contemporary projects will be explored in more detail in Chapter 6, but it is worth noting here that they are frequently framed in this way as being merely the most recent in a historical series of key acts of assistance, in

relation to which the community might trace its course of development. In these different ways, then—bringing together the actions of community leaders, Nicaragua’s president, NGO officials and the local patron saint—the growth and ongoing vitality of the community is discursively performed as a product of crucial outside intervention.

Part 3: Ethnicity and transformation

It has been seen that local accounts of history accorded a significant role to transformations effected by outside actors and powers of different kinds. In this section, I turn to focus in particular on one such notable transformation which has a specific resonance in the field community, involving a putative shift of ethnicity. Recent historical scholarship of Nicaragua—primarily that of Jeffrey Gould (1993, 1996, 1998)—has emphasised the pernicious effects at a national level of a pervasive ‘myth of *mestizaje*’, a broad cultural claim that ethnicity in Spanish Nicaragua was a thing of the past. Gould argues that discursive disavowal of the existence of Indian communities within Spanish-speaking Nicaragua—at a time when in fact many such communities retained a vital institutional existence—stood as a primary causal factor underpinning the *actual* disintegration of these indigenous communities throughout the 19th century; as lands were privatised and large haciendas expanded into formerly indigenous territories.

These arguments are of pressing relevance in relation to the region surrounding the field site. Lands traditionally belonging to Chorotegan Indians overlap with the title granted to the Gualiqueme cooperative. The neighbouring cooperative in San Critobal is almost entirely located within such lands. And as documented by Monachon and Gonda (2009), the *Comunidad Indígena de Telpaneca*—a political organisation representing this historic indigenous community—has been involved in a continuing political struggle aimed at gaining recognition of jurisdiction over this territory, and an accompanying right to receive

the traditional rent for which those occupying the land would be liable. As those authors document, disintegration of communal lands has led to a weakening of subjective indigenous identity throughout the area. While they, in tandem with the leadership of the contemporary *Comunidad Indígena*, advocate the resuscitation and reconstruction of indigenous selves,⁴⁶ I wish to focus here on some of the cultural work achieved by this repudiation of ethnicity in the current political context, and in relation to the themes that will be explored throughout this thesis.

The issue of ethnicity, and ethnic categories as components of identity, can perhaps best be characterised as exhibiting a submerged existence among Gualiqueme residents. It is worth noting that ethnicised descriptions were frequently employed by others when describing Gualiqueme villagers in general, or sometimes certain individuals in particular. Physical attributes such as height, skin colour, and less commonly individual traits such as gait or style of speech were singled out as evidencing an ethnic status of either '*indio*' (Indian) or, less commonly, '*indígena*' (indigenous). Such biologised ethnic framings were frequently employed by non-residents when making mention of Gualiqueme, particularly by residents of the nearby town Condega. But these ideas were also sometimes drawn upon by residents of the village themselves in reference to their neighbours. As has been made clear, the community's founding members came from a number of communities of origin, and, additionally, there was already diversity within those communities prior to the revolution. Gregorio, for example, grew up in the community of La Pita, one of the principal places of origin of Gualiqueme residents. Most people there, he commented, were *gente indígena*, but his own family he described as *colonos*, non-indigenous tenant farmers relatively new to the area.

⁴⁶ In part through an effort to reconstruct the Chorotegan language, a language which has no surviving speakers.

What I will explore here, however, is the fact that these ethnic terms were almost universally disavowed within the community as terms of self-identification, except in very occasional situations of confidence and trust—and even then in ambiguous and distanced fashion. In open and casual usage, it was almost always *other people* who were the *indios*. Despite this, ethnic terms were continually referenced in everyday life. While the term *indígena* was rarely heard, the word *indio* served as a common category of abuse, dismissive description and critical evaluation.⁴⁷ This range of references called up diverse connotations, but the local the potency of the category, I suggest, had to do with both the intense stigma surrounding it, as well as its ambiguous reference in relation to local people themselves. The security of always situating ‘Indianness’ elsewhere, for many Gualiqueme residents, was continually threatened by the possibility of *yourself* being encompassed by this tainted category. It will be useful to begin by briefly pointing to some of the ways in which these terms surface in everyday usage, before examining the cultural work achieved by their repudiation.

Indios and indígenas

To call somebody else *indio* was categorically derogatory, and implied a racialised lack of cultural sophistication and advancement. Frequently hurled about, often in irony and jest, occasionally in anger, the term was one of the most commonly heard epithets in everyday use. On one occasion, I was chatting to a couple of men on the central street of Gualiqueme as a motorbike drove past, ridden by Adolfo Quintero, a member of one of the village’s most significant and prosperous families. Roberto—a resident of Condega who had established a modest shop in the village—wrinkled up his nose in apparent disapproval, and commented bitterly that Quintero was just an ‘arrogant Indian’ (*indio fachenta*). He proceeded to provide an account of the young

⁴⁷ As is common throughout Spanish America (Wade, 1997).

man's biological history, noting that his great-grandparents had been 'true / proper Indians' (*meros indios*), that he was descended from a man who was the illegitimate offspring (*hijo natural*) of a wealthy *hacendado* and an 'Indian woman'. Now, the man in question happened to be the founding president of the Gualiqueme cooperative mentioned above, a notable 'historic collaborator' (*colaborador historico*) of the FSLN and a widely respected local figure in recent history. But this racially-inflected sense of disjuncture articulated in Roberto's comment—between the perceived ostentation of possessing a motorbike and an attribution of 'low' ethnic origin—serves to indicate the connotations of backwardness and simplicity.

Indeed, at times *indio* was employed as meaning primarily 'poor' in an economic sense, although distinct definitions overlapped and could be ambiguous. On another occasion I had been speaking to a couple of young men in Gualiqueme and they mentioned that people in the adjacent village of El Poso accused Gualiqueme people of being *indios*. But that was nonsense, they both argued, because people there are even poorer than us, though they may not think so.⁴⁸ *We have lands, but they have nothing*, they insisted. Here, the term *indio* was interpreted to mean someone materially impoverished, and the cooperative's possession of land was marshalled as evidence that insinuations of being *indio* are misplaced, sidestepping physiological definitions of the category.⁴⁹

At times, however, the word *indio* was used adjectivally with less moralised connotations, indicating technological or cultural simplicity. For example, 'Indian soap' (*jabón indio*) was used to describe a cheaper form of unbranded laundry soap

⁴⁸ Specifically, they commented that El Poso people 'think that they're wearing trainers, when really they go about in flip flops' (*andan chinelas*).

⁴⁹ Interestingly, Monachon and Gonda (2009, p19) quote residents of Mozonte, Telpaneca who consider themselves members of the *Comunidad Indígena*, and who articulate the inverse formulation; specifically defining an indigenous person as one who has land (because of their rootedness in the historic area of indigenous land), as opposed to *campesinos*, who are taken to be generally landless: "Los campesinos son personas sin tierras, mientras que nosotros los indígenas la poseemos". (Peasants are people without lands, but we, the indigenous, have it)

available for purchase from town, the description contrasting it with more expensive branded products reportedly of better quality. ‘Indian chickens’ was the name commonly given to the traditionally-raised breed—hardy and capable of independently foraging for survival with few inputs or assistance—as opposed to ‘farm hens’ (*gallinas de granja*) which require purchased feed and more medical intervention, and in theory are capable of higher productivity if such inputs are available.⁵⁰

But there were also occasions when the category of *indio* seemed, even while serving as a derogatory category, to imply the possibility of identification. On one occasion Wilber was criticising his mother Esperanza for what he presented as an inappropriate openness with her house. The front door of a house should be kept shut, he insisted. People shouldn’t feel free to just wander into the kitchen without so much as a greeting, and take a seat, as regular visitors often did. The kitchen should be reserved for the cook (*la coninera*), he protested, and guests should only be made welcome in the living room. All of the houses near theirs kept their front doors habitually closed, he continued, and it was only his mother who felt it appropriate to present an open invitation to any passing wanderer to come in. His mother responded that all their closest neighbours were like that because they were just *indios*, and that she would be ashamed to behave in that way.

Now, the households closest to the compound of Esperanza’s family, the neighbours being referred to in this discussion, almost exclusively comprised people who were from the same community of origin as Esperanza herself, El Espinal. At other times, Esperanza stressed that they were all the same (*de lo mismo*), just a single family (*de un solo*); pointing out the shared surnames that were held by the majority

⁵⁰ It is notable that the chickens received through *Bono Productivo* distributions (cf. Chapter 6) were ‘farm chickens’. Many beneficiaries experienced problems with chickens sickening or becoming entirely unproductive; in part no doubt due to their unfamiliarity with the more delicate and input-heavy requirements of the breed, as well as an inability to afford the expensive feed required to sustain them properly.

of the sector's inhabitants. Indeed, she would often state that the entire community of El Espinal had been composed of members of the same family. In addition, Esperanza was at other times prepared to acknowledge and identify with an identity as *indio*, although such self-descriptions were always sensitive. Her mobilisation here of the category *indio* to imply a lamentable anti-sociability and privacy points to the way an ambiguous and stigmatised ethnic category opens a path for possible transformation. It is a part of herself, she implied, that she had been able to overcome through striving to behave appropriately. In the next section, I indicate the ways in which the qualities attributed to this potent ethnic category have served to bind understandings of identity into theories about the transformative potential of state power.

Linguistic inversion: the incapacities of *indios*

While biologised, cultural and economic definitions of 'Indianness' informed the uses discussed thus far, the most consistent feature picked out by Gualiqueme residents when characterising and defining actually-existing *indios*—people always situated a distance, either spatially or temporally, from the speaker—appeared to be a startling inability to talk, a fundamental confusion of tongues. Wilber, for example, articulated this idea starkly after he had chastised his mother for using a word that he considered to be too *indio* to be used in polite company. She had referred to her stomach as *la barriga*, and Wilber had immediately interrupted her, insisting that *barriga* was meaningless, a senseless Indian word that conveyed nothing, and that the correct term to use was '*estómago*'.⁵¹ The thing about *indios*, he explained, is that they are stupid. They don't understand anything. Our ancestors that lived here before, he told me—*los antepasados* was the word he used—just like the *indios* that still live in

⁵¹ It is worth noting that *barriga* is not indigenous etymologically, and is a word commonly used in peninsular Spanish. Wilber's identification of the word as being 'indio' was likely based on a perception of a lack of formality and refinement in comparison to *estómago*.

some remote communities, were unable to speak. They might try and say ‘left’, but the word ‘right’ would come out of their mouths. If they tried to say ‘son’, they would say ‘daughter’. And so on. They couldn’t communicate, and their words were jumbled and backwards in relation to their referents.

This notion of confusion and communicative inability caused by unwitting lexical inversion appeared to function as a standardised image of indigeneity among Gualiqueme residents, one that I heard articulated on numerous occasions when residents attempted to characterise *indios*. Crucially, however, this unfortunate condition had—for Gualiqueme residents at least—become a thing of the past. While *indios* still existed, who remained beset by these cultural disadvantages, for Gualiqueme residents a cultural gulf had been opened up between them and their *antepasados*.

Wilber’s comments regarding how this transition came about are again instructive. *The Revolution is what happened*, he explained. With the revolution came groups of ‘*profesores*’—participants in the Literary Crusade—who taught people to read and write. As a consequence of the revolution, schools were established that people could attend for free.⁵² It is indeed the case that for many older residents of Gualiqueme, the first experience of being able to write came about through their experiences, in their communities of origin, participating in Literacy Crusade classes. Though some individuals who have been involved in administrative elements of cooperative organisational work have retained literacy levels gained during those classes, in many cases the skills older rural people acquired did not progress very far, and were later lost through lack of practice in the years that followed. But the ability to sign documents yourself (*poner la firma*) is widely taken by beneficiaries of the Crusade in Gualiqueme to indicate a categorical shift between a prior state of

⁵² Rose Spalding (2012) provides a historical account of these central social interventions, setting them in comparative perspective with policy regimes of more recent political phases.

unchanging ignorance, and the transition to a state of progress, however gradual. This amounted to a sense that the Literacy Crusade and continuing state provision of education had been responsible for a categorical shift in the *kind* of people Gualaqueme residents were, effecting a transition from uncivilised *indios* to full members of the category of ‘the poor’ (*los pobres*). Within such claims is conveyed the sense that any deficiencies attributable to ethnicity have been overcome and eliminated through the progressions made possible by the revolution.

Now, it is important to emphasise that I make no assertion here about causal shifts in local intellectual history. In other words, I am not suggesting that it was *in order* to make these assertions about transformation by the revolutionary state that Gualaqueme residents have come to repudiate ethnic identities. In all probability, such identities were already stigmatised and disavowed well before the Sandinistas came along.⁵³ My analysis here is intended to elucidate the way these long-standing disavowals have come to be incorporated and mobilised in novel ways amid a nexus of contemporary ideas about transformation and assistance, becoming bound up with related assumptions about the relationship of Gualaqueme residents to outside powers, and understandings of the effects and outcomes of the revolution. In this regard, the stigmatisation of indigeneity among an ethnically-ambiguous population appears—at least in part—to have served the conceptual goal of *performing* a transformed personhood and identity, through the formative assistance of the revolutionary state.

⁵³ Unfortunately the data I possess do not allow me to state whether any of my informants have ever, within their lifetimes, positively identified as being *indio* or *indígena*. The general literature on ethnicity in Nicaragua suggests, however, that this would have been unlikely (e.g., Gould, 1993; Gould, 1996, 1998)

Conclusion

We have seen, then, that transformation as a central value has been taken up by Gualiqueme residents—in accordance with the Sandinista injunction to become New Men and New Women (cf. Montoya, 2012b)—but that it has emerged in crucial conjunction with another key theme running through historical understandings; that of assistance. Through repudiation of a stigmatised ethnic status as *indios*, Gualiqueme residents work to frame themselves as having been brought, through the



Figure 12—Young adults in Gualiqueme completing homework for an adult education class.

changes of the revolution, into a national developmental project. These notions of the inauguration of a novel social identity blend into the understanding that with the foundational distribution of land to the community—a gift generally attributed to the personalised political agency of Daniel Ortega—a novel social pact of support and assistance with the revolutionary government came into being. With notable acts of transformative assistance accorded a central place in both the emergence of the community and the formation of novel social identities, personhood and the past

combine as indicators of the fundamental importance of ensuring an appropriate relationship with distant power. The following chapter, however, turns to the ways in which involvement with land amid processes of de-collectivisation have brought some of the implicit tensions of this understanding of political power to the surface of everyday life.

Chapter 4—*Derecho*: rights, ownership and entitlement in cooperative land relations

Land has been a tremendously fraught issue in Nicaragua in each recent phase of political history. Agrarian reform was, of course, one of the key components of the revolutionary Sandinista government's political program in the 1980s. Scholars have documented the shifting policy orientation across that decade, during which time the form redistributive measures took was closely informed by key assumptions about the role of the peasantry in processes of historical and national development (Deere, Marchetti and Reinhardt, 1985; Martí i Puig, 2001; Saldaña-Portillo, 2003; Wright, 1995; Zalkin, 1988). These theoretical and sociological postulates and prescriptions came to be pragmatically altered in the face of an ongoing diagnosis of the reasons for evident rural discontent, a political unease which as the decade progressed appeared to be reflected in disturbing levels of support for counter-revolutionary activity (Martí i Puig, 2001). From an initial emphasis on the creation of state farms, the FSLN moved initially towards the creation of agrarian cooperatives such as the Rigoberto Cruz, but towards the end of the 1980s shifted towards distributing title to individual peasant families (Baumeister, 1985; Jonakin, 1997).

With their unexpected electoral defeat in 1990, however, the Sandinistas rushed to pass laws and distribute legal titles in order to try and protect the lands which had been redistributed during their decade in power.⁵⁴ With the coming to office of the UNO coalition, key demands of the political opposition to the FSLN came to take centre stage in domestic politics, with restitution of expropriated property a central issue. The Chamorro administration soon established a commission to review cases of confiscation, but not before many former landowners

⁵⁴ Because of the extent to which elite Sandinistas personally benefited from these efforts this process came to be known as 'la piñata', in reference to the children's game which involves children grabbing as many sweets as they can.

had taken matters into their own hands and attempted to evict the new owners of their old properties (Close, 1999). In this context, questions of land tenure have unsurprisingly remained a central political issue. The topic has been all the more important given the extent to which lands distributed as collective properties during the 1980s, particularly those granted to CAS cooperatives, came to be informally parcelled out by members. Across Nicaragua, the vast majority of CAS and CAD cooperatives divided out collective lands among members in the years since 1990, and in many cases voted to dissolve themselves as institutions. Cooperatives had already come into severe difficulties with the sharp contraction of state support and assistance in the final years of the 1980s, as the Sandinista government implemented elements of a 'structural adjustment' policy framework in order to try and bring spiralling inflation under control (Enriquez, 2010). But with the 1990 electoral victory of the UNO coalition, state support for the cooperative sector dried up completely, and many cooperatives found themselves in dire economic straits, often having to sell off land in order to repay debts (Marti i Puig, 2001). In some cases of parcelling land was formally measured and titled, but in most cases the process of division has been informal.

In the face of this widespread informality in land ownership, many commentators have argued that economic recovery and rural development critically depended upon regularisation, requiring a broad program of land titling (Bandiera, 2007; Stanfield, 1995). As Broegaard (2005, 2009) has documented for the Nicaraguan case, however, there doesn't appear to be a straightforward relationship between formal tenure and what he terms 'subjective' or 'perceived' tenure security. He concludes that:

'perceived tenure security may not necessarily coincide with the legal tenure situation, just as perceived (in)security may differ from 'objective' measures of (in)security, such as (low) frequency of land conflicts, court cases and evictions' (Broegaard, 2005, p851).

This chapter responds to Broeegaard's call to investigate the 'landholders' point of view' in relation to land tenure by providing a detailed ethnographic account of the ways in which Gualiqueme residents have handled and viewed the process of parcelling cooperative land, and established claims to personal plots within formerly collective areas. In providing an account of the shift from collective to personal labour and landholding among Rigoberto Cruz *socios*, it will be shown that adequately accounting for the landholders' point of view demands that attention be paid to the ways in which divergent, and even opposed articulations of entitlement emerge and intersect in close relation to broader assumptions about what is required for productive living. Involvements with land, it will be seen, bring into play broad problematics pertaining to the 'dilemma' of efficacy outlined in Chapter 1. A key emphasis is placed on eligibilities emerging from capacities contained within the body; crucial transformative potential and legitimating capacity is attributed to the ability to struggle in labour, and these capacities are central to notions of entitlement. But it will be seen that it is inappropriate to read this as primarily an effort to shrug off state control, such that the process of parcelling is viewed as the realisation of putatively individualist peasant priorities, striving for autonomy in the face of the collectivist impositions of the Sandinista state during the 1980s.⁵⁵ Rather, we will see that this emphasis upon eligibilities guaranteed through effort and labour are, crucially, cast in tense relation to encompassing, enabling frameworks of administrative allocation, and particularly the notion of land as a foundational political gift (a theme already touched on in Chapter 3). In striving to guarantee their access to land within the cooperative title, then, Gualiqueme residents have not only been aiming to secure an autonomous subsistence livelihood in the face of widespread economic difficulties and uncertainties regarding tenure, but also to

⁵⁵ Forrest D Colburn (1986, 1989), for example, has argued that the broad rural response to Sandinista agrarian policy in the 1980s can be characterised as that of rational actors pragmatically protecting their 'individual' interests by opposition to state intentions and directives, an opposition that principally emerged in 'everyday forms of resistance'.

ensure that the foundational social compact with the national state inaugurated by their participation in the Sandinista revolution is concretely realised, and that a relation of political involvement with the state is protected. Casting land as a political gift, but one which needs to be seized, realised and preserved by active struggle, cooperative members work to reconcile notions of entitlement grounded in bodily labour with a political imaginary of distributive assistance focussed upon the national government, the president in particular. In Gualiqueme, I will argue, these issues have played out through the varying ways in which the complex concept of '*derecho*' has been understood and enacted, and I turn first to a brief overview of this key idea. The chapter will proceed by unpacking the various local constructions of *derecho*, and in the process will recount some of the key moments in the division of cooperative land, thus bringing us up to the present in our narrative account of the history of Gualiqueme.

***Derecho*: rights, land and entitlement**

Over the course of the Rigoberto Cruz Cooperative's history, the key concept of *derecho* has played a crucial role in mediating local negotiations of land, entitlement, and understandings of Sandinista political identity. While literally meaning 'right'—in the sense of a legal right—the concept in local usage is multivalent, ambiguous, and keenly contested. In this section I will provide a brief overview of the most significant of these distinct usages and their implications, before proceeding in subsequent sections to provide an account of how these distinct conceptualisations have played out in practice. Exploring the divergent locally-active readings and nuances of *derecho*, I suggest, offers us a point of entry into the social dynamics that have played out within the cooperative over time, particularly in relation to land; and exploring its entangled temporal, legal and political dimensions stands as a means to document some of the key conflicts and processes that comprise the cooperative's history. As will be seen more fully in later chapters, some of the notions of *derecho* to

be explicated here also tie into and inform local engagements with Ortega's national distributive politics and an 'assistentialist' institutional context more generally (cf. Chapter 6), and some of its most potent articulations have been formulated in relation to political contexts beyond the boundaries of the cooperative.

At times, a *derecho* within the cooperative is simply understood as a plot of land, a fair share of the total land grant originally awarded to the cooperative as a whole; generally calculated by dividing the total amount of land by the total number of *socios*, with a resulting figure of ten, sometimes twelve *manzanas*. Being a *socio* of the cooperative, from this perspective, primarily means having the right to possess your own personal share of this land. Although already exhibiting a crucial ambiguity between actually-held and potentially-held land, such formulations construe *derecho* straightforwardly as simply property with a particular origin. *Derecho* becomes something that is worked, that can be bought and sold, divided up among children before or after one's death, something that at times needs to be defended against competing claims; in other words, sharing in the complex characteristics of any other kind of land.

Through this conceptualisation, the features of *derecho* become bound up with the involvement of land with processes of inheritance and other aspects of the developmental cycle of the rural household; and particular tensions arise from conflicts between the inherent qualities of land (as being, for example, easily and unambiguously divisible), and the qualities pertaining to other readings of *derecho* to be discussed below, such as membership in an organisation (which might be transferable, but is much less obviously capable of division). Involvements with this construction of *derecho*, as a result of the ambiguity between actually-held and potentially-held land already mentioned, also situate people within complex temporalities; the 'ten *manzanas*' mentioned refers to an amount anticipated upon an imagined, theoretical future division of the cooperative, and fails to take into account the realities of the existence of the cooperative at present, in which parts of the land

are still held collectively, and other parts are reserved as being (in theory) ‘untouchable’; for environmental reasons, for example, or because it comprises part of the cooperative’s collectively-managed pine forest. And yet that imagined future share has continually informed action in the ongoing present of the cooperative in distinct ways; through the process of ‘grabbing’ (*agarrando*) land in order to actualise individual possession of one’s *derecho*, through justifications of and understandings of the consequences of the (theoretically prohibited) sale and purchase of land within the cooperative, and through political settlements between cooperative leaders and rebellious groups of former members.

Such constructions of *derecho*-as-land tangle and intersect with more expansive, abstract definitions which view *derecho* as primarily connoting cooperative membership, and insist that rights within the cooperative entail obligations which must be fulfilled. In these formulations, land accessed through the cooperative is secondary to membership, and stands as an entitlement gained by fulfilling the duties of being a proper *socio*. Land in the cooperative, from this perspective, cannot simply be possessed as if it were any other kind of private property. Its use brings with it associated demands to embody certain ideals of collectivity and community; attending meetings, participation in collective labour. This positing of *participation* as a fundamental prerequisite of one’s *derecho* necessarily entails the possibility of exclusion; those who fail to meet such normative expectations of collective existence potentially lose their formal rights to property or membership (even if actually expelling them from areas of cooperative land already under their possession is infeasible or undesirable). As different groups over the years have demanded individual title to their share of cooperative land, some of them pulling out of participation in the cooperative, such definitions have been brought into play in decisions to deny access to certain benefits and distributions channelled through the cooperative, all of this playing out in a face-to-face context where personal loyalties and enmities cut across abstract or theoretical concerns. The

history of the way these ideas have played out have led to *derecho* also being formulated as the simple idea of having a right to live within the community. In addition, since only a fraction of residents in the community are *socios* of the cooperative, many claim entitlements by extension of the rights of others, living ‘in the shadow’ (*en la sombra*) of the *derechos* of parents, parents-in-law, spouses or



Figure 13—A Gualaqueme resident stands by the boundary marking the extent of the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative’s territory.

other relatives. These extensions and creative deployments, always bound up with kinship relations, reveal the way ideas of *derecho*—far from leading to a stable and clear-cut distinction between members and non-members of the cooperative—have been continually and actively negotiated by individuals within their local political and social context.

Finally, *derecho* at other moments is construed as a broader and encompassing right to revolutionary recognition earned through the suffering and sacrifice of having participated in both the revolution and the civil war that followed. Entitlement here is constructed as only contingently related to the cooperative,

guaranteed by political status in relation to an encompassing Sandinista political hierarchy. As such, *derecho* here is understood to depend upon being able to successfully articulate and establish in the eyes of others the fact of such participation in constitutive experiences of Sandinista revolutionary subjectivity. This formulation blends rights within the cooperative into a broader articulation of revolutionary subjectivity, one that has been developing since 1979 on a national scale. Recognition of such subjectivity can entail, and is actively hoped to entail, access to material distributions, entitlement to flows of economic resources from the political centre and mediated by local leaders; just those concrete benefits which rival constructions of *derecho* construe as depending specifically on *derecho*-as-membership within the cooperative. Those who consider their *derecho* within the cooperative to have been lost or threatened frequently resort to articulations of this wider conceptualisation of Sandinista entitlement, viewing local problems regarding their status as cooperative members as bringing wider political identities into play. Having provided this brief overview of the primary ways in which the concept of *derecho* is conceptualised among Gualiqueme residents, I proceed to explore the concrete implications these divergent readings of entitlement have had in the course of the cooperative's experience of land division.

Derecho-as-land—El Zapote

The notion that membership of the cooperative primarily constitutes a right to a share of the total land holdings of the organisation is clearly related to the fact that so many of Nicaragua's cooperatives have already dissolved themselves and divided their collective property in accordance with this principle. Gualiqueme was previously one among five adjacent agricultural cooperatives. Of its neighbours, three have fully dissolved themselves and legally divided land among members as individual property, and one remains in operation as a cooperative but has formally divided land between members through a process of legal measurement. On a

national level, formerly collectivised cooperatives have almost entirely divided themselves in this way (but cf. Ruben and Lerman, 2005). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the notion of membership in the cooperative and entitlement to a share of its principal property holding, land, is prominent. Familiarity with, and evaluations of, nearby cases of legal division inform local judgements.

The idea of *derecho* as an equal share of the total land area has also been informed, most pressingly, by the internal history of the cooperative. The adjacent village of El Zapote, which was the site of Fruto Días' hacienda residence prior to the revolution, is now occupied by a substantial number of former *socios* (cooperative members) of the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative in Gualiqueme. Dissatisfied with what they perceived as corrupt and unfair management of the cooperative, a group of thirty three members demanded that their share be allocated to them in the late 1980s,⁵⁶ when the cooperative was still working in large work teams organised by the *directiva*, and marketing its produce collectively.

The *directiva* of the time initially refused to consider the demand—there was no established legal basis for the division of agricultural cooperatives' holdings at that time (Jonakin, 1997; Kaimowitz, 1988)—and the group responded with direct action. Appropriating a substantial part of the cooperative's herd of cattle as a ransom, the group took possession of a part of the cooperative land in what participants describe as a strategy to put pressure on the cooperative to negotiate ('*una medida de presión*' was the phrase used by one of the group's leaders). With the mediation of two lawyers, one who represented cooperatives in the region, the other from the Ministry of Labour (*ministerio de trabajo*), the group succeeded in forcing a negotiation with the Rigoberto Cruz *directiva*. It was eventually agreed that the group would be ceded a part of the cooperative's total land, which they would be able

⁵⁶ I was unable to determine the exact year in which this event occurred, with informants providing me with conflicting accounts. However, there was agreement that it was prior to the point at which the cooperative stopped operating collectively.

to divide among themselves. A calculation of how much land they should receive was arrived at—in line with the notion of an equal share—by dividing the cooperative’s land title of the time by the total number of members, arriving at a figure of 8.25 *manzanas* per member.⁵⁷ Initially forming a new cooperative, known as Cooperativa Nora Astorga, the group immediately divided the land ceded to them among themselves, and were some years later—with the assistance of an NGO—able to formalise their individual legal titles (see Jonakin, 1996, for an account of comparable processes across Nicaragua). Competing evaluations of the current position of members of that group subsequent to their separation from the cooperative are entertained by villagers, playing in to divergent evaluations of the best future course for the Rigoberto Cruz Cooperative’s remaining holdings. Some residents of El Zapote argue that they benefited hugely from their withdrawal from the cooperative, while some commentators among the current *directiva* in Gualiqueme, for example, view the quantity of land that has been subsequently sold, and the number of that group of thirty three who have consequently been left landless, as a morality tale in the dangers of providing legal land title to economically-precarious *campesinos*.

The experience of negotiating this settlement with the El Zapote group solidified in the minds of remaining Rigoberto Cruz *socios* the possibility of a certain way of seeing the collective land holdings of the cooperative; as a multiplicity of discrete individual shares, waiting to be one day realised. This future-oriented

⁵⁷ The land possessed by Rigoberto Cruz Cooperative at present is divided between two separate legal titles corresponding to the different historical origins of the land in question, one of approximately 1300 *manzanas*, the other, allocated to the cooperative some years after its formation (and, I believe, *after* the separation of the El Zapote group described here) of around 2000 *manzanas*. The figure for land entitlement arrived at for the El Zapote group of 8.25 *manzanas* was thus calculated only in relation to the smaller of the two titles. It should be noted that some residents of El Zapote maintain that they would be entitled to *additional* cooperative land, that pertaining to their equal share of the second legal title, in the event of a future comprehensive division of Rigoberto Cruz’s holdings.

construction of *derecho* as a yet-to-be-realised personal share of land, however, has informed a variety of distinct practical strategies, which require further exploration.

The process of land division within the cooperative

Initially, the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative worked primarily to produce coffee for export in line with the conceptualisation of rural development which underpinned the design of collectivised cooperatives (Martinez, 1993; Saldaña-Portillo, 2003). *Socios* were initially conceptualised as employee-owners with a direct stake in the management of the enterprise through their obligation to participate in assemblies. Key administrative decisions were undertaken by members of the *directiva*, working during the 1980s in collaboration with state technical advisors. *Socios* were paid a wage by the cooperative and were required to purchase maize and beans, along with the other necessities for subsistence, from state-operated outlets (Wright, 1995).

Discontent with these initial arrangements led the Rigoberto Cruz assembly to vote in favour of dividing up their coffee lands, initially into three broad areas which were allocated to three collective work teams; groups of *socios* partly corresponding to kinship networks within the village, and relatedly to the varying places of origin of different members. These groups were initially simply responsible for independently organising and managing labour arrangements within their allocated areas, with produce remaining marketed centrally via the cooperative in conjunction with state purchasing agencies. However, with the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990 and the dramatic policy shift brought about by the Chamorro administration, cooperatives across Nicaragua were thrown into economic turmoil. Rigoberto Cruz, along with other cooperatives in northern Nicaragua, became a member of PRODECOOP; a 'second-tier cooperative' dedicated to international sale of coffee, whose members comprise cooperatives. Membership of this organisation enabled the decision to be taken among Rigoberto Cruz *socios* to market coffee individually. Each of the three collective working groups chose to divide their lands

between individual members, with *socios* subsequently selling their harvests primarily to PRODECOOP.

The economic turmoil of the post-1990 period also led to the sale of the cooperative's dairy herd. While state funding, access to credit and flexibility with debt rescheduling had been freely available while the FSLN had been in power,⁵⁸ the Chamorro administration introduced policies which have been viewed by some commentators as positively designed to undermine cooperatives (Enriquez, 1997). Certainly, more or less all state support, access to technical services and credit was suddenly withdrawn, and the effect of this across Nicaragua was in many cases the bankruptcy and later disbanding of CAS cooperatives⁵⁹; though it should also be noted that this was the first time that legal provision was made for dividing up cooperative land individually, or gaining legal title to cooperatives already divided informally (Jonakin, 1996, 1997). In the case of the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative, debts accrued became unmanageable, and in order to raise the necessary capital to repay them, the herd of cattle was mostly sold off, with remaining animals divided out between *socios*.

Land which had previously served as pasture was also in some way divided up among cooperative members as *arado*⁶⁰ for the production of *granos basicos* ('basic grains'; i.e., maize and beans). I remain vague here about the exact process of division of this former pasture land because of the stark contrast between different modes of

⁵⁸ Jonakin (1996, p1182) observes that 'during the 1980s the attempt to reactivate the economy revolved around land redistribution and lavish producer loans of which the SAR [Sandinista Agrarian Reform] beneficiaries on the CAS were primary recipients. Whether for long-term purchases of capital goods or short-term borrowing to cover planting costs, loan requests were rarely rejected. Typically the CAS faced lower interest rates relative to other producers'

⁵⁹ As explained earlier, CAS was the term given to refer to Sandinista Agrarian Cooperatives (*Cooperativas Agrícolas Sandinistas*), of which Rigoberto Cruz was a militarised variant.

⁶⁰ The term *arado* literally refers to 'ploughland', though in many cases it is not necessarily cultivated by plough. Though some villagers have access to oxen-drawn ploughs, for those that don't own them rental is expensive, and depending on available funds digging sticks will be used. On more severely inclined or rocky parcels, use of the digging stick is considered the only option.

narrating the course of events among residents of Gualiqueme. Some individuals speak of a process of orderly division, in which cooperative members were fairly allocated a certain set amount of the available *arado*, through the centrally-administrated measurement of parcels and the drawing of lots; a process putatively undertaken in relation to the broad notion of *derecho* as equal shares in the cooperative's total land holdings. This depiction of systematic and institutionally-regulated division, however, competes with accounts which present the process as being entirely spontaneous and uncontrolled, with individual *socios* 'grabbing' (*agarrando*) land for themselves in an effort to independently realise their own *derecho*-as-land. In these latter depictions, the strongest and most cunning (*más vivo*) proactively grabbed themselves prime terrain, while others were left to scabble for remaining scraps, or were in some cases left with nothing.

While local narrative accounts tended to focus exclusively on one or the other aspect of this process—highlighting the extent to which recollections of the past stand as performative efforts in the present to validate particular values and norms—I think it can most accurately be stated that *both* opposed processes took place simultaneously, in a dual process of allocation and *agarrando*. Some cooperative members were indeed initially allocated modest parcels of *arado*, while others (including some of those already allocated parcels) have since 'grabbed' it both in response to, and in extension of, this initial formal division. Both processes, however, were enacted in relation to the notion of *derecho* as a share of land.

The process of acquisition of coffee lands by individual cooperative members exhibits a comparable duality. As already mentioned, the cooperative had initially divided *socios* into three work teams, each of them responsible for collectively managing a portion of the total coffee land. Increasing dissatisfaction with collective working—or, perhaps, an increasing sense that alternatives were realistically available—prompted each of these groups to decide to divide up their allotted lands among members. Some, recounting the allocation, present this as a situation in

which everyone received an equal share of approximately one *manzana* per member. Others, however, bitterly recount having been swindled by cunning (*vivo*) leaders of the groups, whose wily machinations secured them generous portions of prime mountain land, leaving others with little or nothing.

Esperanza, for example, describes her own family's experience as follows. They were members of 'Group Three', and in theory, she insisted, with four cooperative members in the family, should have been entitled to four *manzanas* of coffee land. When the land was allocated, however, Esperanza describes having received just three quarters of a *manzana* between them. Others, she recalled, received their complete allocation, but her own family did not. In response, and in an effort to realise in her own possession her own *derecho*—figured here as a full share of the cooperative's total land holdings—she set about clearing (*socolando*), and thereby claiming, previously uncultivated mountainous land. She 'grabbed' an area of around eight *manzanas*, planting it with coffee by taking out credit in order to pay for day labourers (*mozos*) to undertake the work. When I enquired of her exactly what *derecho* referred to, she responded unambiguously that it meant, simply, land, ten *manzanas* each (*cada uno*). She conceptualised her unauthorised efforts to gain possession of this theoretical share of the total land as a struggle to realise her *derecho* in opposition to the devious tactics of cunning cooperative leaders to deprive her of her due share.

Agarrando: grabbing land

'Grabbing' land in this way has, then, been a crucial way in which cooperative members have attempted to secure personal rights to legally-collective territory. Such efforts tap into long-standing frontier traditions of establishing territorial and proprietorial claims which prevail among rural farmers across Central America. Lynn Horton (1998, p39), in a study of a nearby region, describes Nicaraguan peasants as using the term *derecho* to refer to the claims established by frontier

peasants in the 1950s, whose notions of entitlement and property revolved around claims based upon the effort of opening up new areas for cultivation.⁶¹ While this suggests that the explicit notion of *derecho* in relation to modes of establishing claims to previously-uncultivated land pre-dates Sandinista politics, it should be noted that Horton's informants in Quilalí are all members of a subsequently-established agrarian cooperative. There exists the possibility that their narrative accounts of pre-1979 frontier farming have been informed and inflected by later experiences within Sandinista cooperatives. Nevertheless, it is clearly the case that the contemporary process of 'grabbing' land stands in relation to this frontier tradition.⁶² Daniel Nugent's (1993) historical ethnography of popular culture among agrarian reform beneficiaries in Mexico reveals a comparable insistence upon the effort of labour as the primary guarantor of legitimate ownership. For Gualiqueme residents as for the early 20th century Namiquipans who comprise the subjects of Nugent's study, fencing areas off, or undertaking the necessary work to clear the forest or undergrowth required to begin to actively cultivate, are both considered to generate a certain legitimacy of possession to the one who undertakes this work. The notion of struggle (*lucha, luchando*) is invoked, associating the vigorous effort required to open up new land with legitimate ownership. Within the cooperative, however, this process of actively working to establish and legitimate ownership over particular plots has played out in close association with differing, even opposed, notions of legitimacy implied by the contrasting constructions of *derecho*-as-membership and *derecho*-as-land discussed above. While entitlement to allocated land is rooted in notions of membership, ideas surrounding the grabbing of land posit that realisation

⁶¹ 'According to Valdéz and other Quilalí informants, peasant squatters rarely made any effort to legalize the parcel of mountain land on which they squatted because in this era, custom on the agricultural frontier held that the peasant who opened the first path into the virgin forest acquired "rights" (*derechos*) over this land' (Horton, 1998, p39).

⁶² Cf. Fernanda de Soto Joya (2011) for a sensitive ethnographic account of the agrarian frontier in Nicaragua.

of the abstract entitlements of membership requires personal struggle, the enactment of a force (*fuera*) contained within the body.

Oppositions between constructions of the process of land acquisition as being centred around on the one hand allocation, and on the other *agarrando*, also structure complaints about and evaluations of particular cases of failure to realise *derecho*-as-land within the cooperative. One woman complained to me that despite being a *socia* of Rigoberto Cruz, because she had no husband she had not been able to acquire any land whatsoever within the cooperative. Implicit here was the sense that actually realising theoretical entitlements as a member required the capacity to labour, here figured as a specifically male capacity. Another resident, Carlos, speaking about his brother's lack of land, also despite being a full *socio* of the cooperative, argued that this failure to realise his theoretical *derecho* was entirely his brother's own fault. Had his brother *wanted* to work, had he been *willing* to undertake the necessary effort of clearing and bringing into cultivation (*socollando*), a new parcel he could easily have established himself as the owner (*dueño*) of some land, Carlos insisted. Any *socios* who didn't have land within the cooperative, he argued, were in that position because they were lazy (*arragánes*) and simply hadn't wanted to work, hadn't bothered to expend the necessary *fuera* to succeed. In both instances, the necessity of actively acquiring and guarding rights of possession through the strenuous activity of male labour is stressed.

These ideas that actual possession of land was inherently guaranteed by the ongoing effort of cultivation, and eligibilities produced by that effort, contained the clear implication that should ongoing effort cease, possession might lapse also. On one occasion, Wilber received a tip-off from Hernan—who was doing the rounds of houses trying to sell vegetables—that someone had been intruding upon a piece of land which Wilber's father considered himself to own. The parcel in question had been 'grabbed' by Wilber's father many years previously, and had been used for planting maize and beans for several years, but had since lain fallow with the family

financially unable to cultivate it; grown over and almost reverted to forest, it was to all appearances abandoned. Upon hearing this news, however, Wilber immediately took action. His father was away from the village visiting a relative at the time, but Wilber decided to investigate first thing the following day. Arriving in the parcel, it was clear that the tip-off was indeed accurate. Someone had started digging up soil to fill seed bags, the first stage in the process of planting new coffee trees. Although after making a few enquiries among other villagers working in parcels nearby Wilber was reasonably sure he knew who it was that was responsible for the intrusion, he had no intention of raising any complaint directly. Rather, the plan was simply to make it clear that the land was owned and that the owners hadn't forgotten about it, by clearing away the overgrown weeds. Upon returning to the village, he asked around in order to recruit a party of workers for the subsequent day. Over the course of that following day's labour, five men working with machetes were able to chop the majority of weeds and saplings back.

Wilber and his family had no intention of planting anything that year—their meagre resources were already insufficient to properly fund the cultivation of their active coffee parcel. Rather, the cost of hiring day labourers was simply considered a worthwhile measure to ensure that the family's claim on the land was publicly performed, while avoiding having to confront anybody directly. Had the rival claimants been successful in getting their new coffee planted, it would by that point have been highly contentious for Wilber and his family to attempt to regain the land. As this incident and the way it was handled makes clear, eligibilities based upon the activity of labour need to be continually enacted, visibly performed, in order to remain viable and retain *de facto* legitimacy. This sense that male labour crucially secures the possibilities of *derecho* also ties efforts to secure land into wider kin relations, a theme to which I now turn. In particular, the ways in which sons and other male relatives of *socios* have negotiated access to land, drawing on the notion of *derecho*, reveals the way in which realisation of entitlements have brought family

relationships into play, and complicates previously-unambiguous distinctions between members and non-members, insiders and outsiders.

Sons, and sons-in-law, of *socios*

The possibility that one individual might work ‘within’ the *derecho* of another was established early in the cooperative’s history, when labour was still primarily organised collectively. Then, the obligations entailed by the membership of a particular *socio* could, if needed, be fulfilled by others on their behalf. A man or woman was able to provide a substitute to fill in for them during their timetabled shifts in the labour schedule. This was generally a son, sometimes a daughter, but might also be a son-in-law, daughter-in-law, or even a neighbour paid a day’s wage to act as a stand-in (i.e., someone working as a ‘*mozo*’, or day labourer). In recent years the same principle continues to be employed in the collective days of labour demanded for community projects (cf. Chapter 6), such as public water works, as well as in the continuing collective labour requirements within the cooperative’s pine forest.⁶³ After the point at which individual parcels had been acquired by members, a distinct form of extension of the rights of cooperative membership emerged when it was decided in an assembly meeting that sons of *socios* could legitimately work within the fields held by parents as part of their *derecho*, a prospect that had initially been controversial. Concerns had already been raised about this practice—already informally engaged in by some *socios* without the authorisation of the cooperative—but a general assembly decision validated it as legitimate; sons could work in the *derecho* of their parents, with *derecho* here referring both to particular parcels of land, and to the broader notion of cooperative membership in relation to which entitlement to those parcels was established. Soon, though, this principle was in practice extended to include the possibility of sons actively *claiming* land within the

⁶³ The pine forest is now the only part of the cooperative that remains collectively managed, administered by the *directiva*.

remit of their parents' *derecho*: undertaking the putatively legitimating labour of *agarrando* in order to establish entitlements to land theorised as being part of their parents' as-yet-unallocated *derecho*.

This was a crucial development. *Socios* had until that point formally been allocated, at most, one to two *manzanas* of coffee land, and perhaps the same again of *arado*, within the cooperative's territory. And yet, as already mentioned, *derecho*-as-land was widely calculated—dividing the total area by the number of members—as comprising at least ten, perhaps twelve *manzanas*. Some households might contain three, four or more *socios*. What this meant in practice was that most relatives of *socios* in need of land could, if they wished, 'grab' land and discursively frame their actions as realising the as-yet-unclaimed *derecho* of a relative. Sons and—even more controversially—sons-in-law of *socios*, increasingly began to stake their claims to cooperative land, deploying notions of *derecho* to legitimate the longstanding frontier strategy of claiming by cultivating, but within the framework of the cooperative's set of assumptions about membership and entitlement. The position of son-in-laws was particularly controversial in relation to this issue because they had in many cases married uxorilocally and originated from other communities. Initially considered 'people from other places' (*gente de otros partes*), their access to cooperative land was viewed by some as a threat to the total holdings, and therefore as a threat to the share of land which should, one day, be available to each member. Perhaps partly as a response to this sense that one's *derecho* might dwindle or even disappear into the hands of others, *socios* themselves, if they were in a position to do so—such as, for example, having been allocated a parcel bordered by uncultivated mountain land—in many cases also began expanding their own holdings in closely comparable efforts to realise their potential *derecho* more fully. They too grabbed land, established ownership claims through labour, and framed this in relation to their notional share of the total cooperative holdings.

Inheriting *derecho*

From the perspective of *socios*, non-*socio* kin have also been wound into cooperative entitlements due to the fact that the allocation of part of their own *derecho* to sons, daughters, or the husbands of daughters has come to be a crucial way in which prevailing inheritance obligations are fulfilled. It is considered appropriate among many rural Nicaraguans to try and provide most adult children with a partial inheritance upon their marriage, such that they can set up an independent household and begin to cultivate maize and beans separately from their parents, maintaining their own kitchen. The qualities of *derecho*-as-land, in this context, stand in clear tension with those constructions which define *derecho* firmly in relation to the idea of membership in the cooperative. While *derecho*-as-membership is indivisible—members, it should be noted, have been required to formally specify a *single* heir who will succeed them as a member of the cooperative in the case of their death—*derecho*-as-land, like any kind of land, is inherently liable to division. That *socios* can split off sections of their *derecho* in inheritance allocations to offspring, then, complicates the land situation considerably.

The use of land accessed through notions of *derecho* in the cooperative additionally brings the ambiguity between actually-held land and notional shares of the total holdings into play in relation to inheritance strategies. Given that a member's *derecho*-as-land frequently, as has been shown, exists as an abstract future possibility rather than an already-realised land holding, land has frequently been proactively 'grabbed' by sons-of-*socios* on the understanding that it comprises part of their inheritance—and also by in-marrying sons-in-law on the understanding that their parents-in-law owe their spouse an inheritance.⁶⁴ Similarly, a given *socio*'s plans for inheritance might take for granted the future possibility of gaining access to the

⁶⁴ Such strategies, of course, might be enacted with greater or lesser degrees of explicit instruction and coordination between parents-in-law and son-in-law.

amount of a *derecho* still ‘owed’, based on individual calculations of amounts already grabbed, allocated, given away or sold. Esperanza, for example, explained to me that she had sold three *manzanas* of land, meaning that she was still owed seven more. That seven, she explained, would cover one *manzana* for her eldest son’s inheritance (who had himself been a *socio* of the cooperative and a member of the El Zapote group), with the remaining six putatively allocated to her youngest son Wilber. None of this anticipated inheritance was at that moment in her possession, and it is easy to comprehend the motivation for a young man promised such an elusive inheritance to seek to realise it rather more concretely, through ‘grabbing’ their share.

Alexis

All of the dynamics described above are usefully illustrated by the account of one Gualiqueme resident, Alexis, of his own process of personal land acquisition. Initially, Alexis’ father had been the only member of their household to be a *socio* of the cooperative. While still working ‘within’ the *derecho* of his father, Alexis himself grabbed an additional parcel, which he described as initially constituting part of his inheritance from his father; part of the broad process just described of sons grabbing land to realise the *derecho* of their parents. Later, however, he was admitted to the cooperative as a full member in his own right, and thereby came to consider himself entitled to a share of *derecho*-as-land of his own. As various residents explained to me in recounting the cooperative’s history, at one point the Rigoberto Cruz *directiva* was told by the local government that the amount of land contained in their collective title was too large given their total number of members; they were given the choice of either admitting additional members or having part of their collective title re-allocated, perhaps to a different cooperative. In response, around 50 new members, generally sons and daughters of existing *socios*, and including Alexis, were accepted as full members of the cooperative. In Alexis’ case, this led to a discursive reframing of land he had already claimed. The parcel that he had initially grabbed

within the framework of assertions of legitimacy enabled by his father's *derecho*, he later came to consider to be his own, retrospectively legitimated by his own more recent membership in the cooperative. In recounting the events, he emphasised that the land coming into his possession, because of his current status as a *socio*, had nothing to do with inheritance.

While many *socios* have deployed the construction of *derecho* as a notional share of total cooperative land to fulfil inheritance obligations (as was the case with Esperazna, above), here Alexis inversely mobilised ideas about entitlement through membership to *separate* his own possession from the kinship connection with his father. A clear implication of the shift in his conceptualisation of the parcel's legitimation, of course, was that his father's inheritance obligations remain to be fulfilled. Indeed, he was keen to stress that another parcel he had acquired from his father also had nothing to do with inheritance, again locating entitlement in his own cooperative membership. Speaking of how he came to hold that particular parcel, Alexis explained that the land had initially been allocated to his father—who as an old member (*socio viejo*) of the cooperative was formally allocated around a *manzana* of *arado* in the initial process of division of the old pasture land. Alexis at that time was still working within the *derecho* of his father, which had at first meant filling-in for his father to fulfil labour obligations in collective work teams, and had subsequently involved assisting him with the cultivation of personal plots once these had been acquired. At that point, he had still not grabbed the parcel mentioned above. An opportunity arose within an NGO project for participants to receive barbed wire and tools to assist in the cultivation of a plot, and Alexis agreed with his father that he would be ceded a half-*manzana* of the land allocated within his father's *derecho*. This allowed him to apply to participate in the project together with another two young men who had access to adjacent parcels. Having later become a full cooperative member, however, he insisted that his entitlement to that particular parcel 'came from the cooperative'.

This rhetorical effort to establish entitlement to the parcel as *not* having come from his father is unlikely to be primarily part of an effort to retain rights to future inheritance, however. Alexis' father subsequently sold nearly all of his own *derecho* and took to working as an itinerant vegetable trader, and so has very little land that could come into Alexis' possession in the event of his death. Rather, it seems probable that it primarily has to do with an effort to actively prevent his father re-establishing claims to the parcel. Alexis pointed out that were his father to try and regain control of the land—in an effort to sell it, for example—he would be within his rights to involve the police. Alexis, then, is marshalling the idea of his own *derecho*-as-membership as granting him full rights to the land to *prevent* familial claims that might otherwise emerge due to the parcel's particular history. In each of these instances, ideas about *derecho*-as-membership and *derecho*-as land within the cooperative, along with practical efforts to realise possession of particular parcels within the frameworks of entitlement conferred by those contrasting conceptualisations of *derecho*, have come to intersect in complex ways with the everyday negotiation of land access within family networks.

Land sales

Members' anxieties about the prospect of realising their envisioned future share of cooperative land have been further fuelled by the *de facto* reality of land sales within the cooperative's territory, despite the formal legal prohibition on such transactions, and the current lack of any prospect of legal title to accompany such sales. Many sales, however, are transfers and exchanges of ownership *between* Rigoberto Cruz members, and are generally considered acceptable by the cooperative membership as a whole, while sales to outsiders (*gente de afuera*) are broadly viewed as deeply worrying. Residents of the field site are familiar with the theory—espoused by leading members of the cooperative *directiva* and local FSLN functionaries—that legalising land sales among the peasantry necessarily sets in motion the same

historical process of concentration and dispossession that culminated in the massive pre-revolutionary haciendas.⁶⁵ As with the history of the process of sharing out parcels within the cooperative, the ongoing activity of land sales tends to be narrated in divergent registers, comparable to the opposition described above between ‘allocation’ and ‘*agarrando*’. On the one hand are accounts emphasising orderliness, certainty and control, and on the other those stressing the uncontrolled, chaotic and free-wheeling nature of the process. Many individuals, speaking about land sales, stressed that they are always undertaken with the consent of the cooperative *directiva*, and that therefore the current state of play regarding the overall status of ownership for any particular part of the cooperative’s collective title is *known*. Indeed, it was taken for granted by many local commentators that ‘the *directiva*’ were in full possession of the relevant knowledge regarding all transactions over the course of the cooperative’s history. However, it is certainly the case that no formal records are kept. The impression I received time and again from such accounts—that there perhaps existed some centralised method of registering and monitoring land sales and exchanges—was misplaced. What was referred to in accounts emphasising control and order, however, was the intuitively obvious sense among residents that ‘everyone’ knows the status of any given parcel; it is simply common and public knowledge who owns and works each part of the total land area, and even if no single individual can provide comprehensive information regarding the cooperative as a whole, they each know what really counts; in other words the boundaries of their own *de facto* holdings, and who owns and works neighbouring parcels. Those who emphasised this controlled and orderly quality to ownership stressed that were the day to come when the cooperative’s lands would be formally divided and legal individual titles allocated, those who had sold lands over the years would have the amount they had sold deducted from their total *derecho*. Fairness would be easy to

⁶⁵ As mentioned in the previous chapter, Jaime Wheelock, a leading member of the FSLN government during the 1980s, published a number of key historical texts laying out this analysis (Wheelock Román, 1975, 1985)

ensure, because *everyone knows* who has sold land, and how much they have sold. If it were to emerge that a *socio* had sold more than his or her entitlement (*más de la cuenta*) they would be required to reimburse the cooperative the difference, so no-one else would lose out.

Other accounts, however, attended more to the uncontrolled and chaotic nature of shifts in ownership and entitlement, and I suggest here that fuelling the anxieties inherent in such understandings is the tension, already alluded to above, between the qualities of *derecho* as a notional share, and the qualities of land as an inherently limited good. The image that most disturbs people—and one that cropped up in narratives and critical commentaries time and again—is that of a cooperative member grabbing land, selling it to outsiders, and then carrying on grabbing more, eventually selling more than their share (*más de la cuenta*). The possibility that the actions of such individuals will leave everyone else with less—a practical (and incontestable) recognition of the cooperative's land as a limited good (Foster, 1965, 1972)—informs the desire of many of those who argue that a legal division of the collective land should be undertaken as soon as possible, to ensure that those who sell their *derecho* end up with nothing, and are unable to continue claiming land through their status as cooperative members. The urgency of efforts to 'grab' and claim entitlement to a fully-realised *derecho* has been further invigorated by this sense of the cooperative's land as a dwindling resource being depleted by the avarice of others. Unless you secure your full share as soon as possible, some *socios* have been led to conclude, you are likely never to receive it, and it is safer to grab it in the present than hold out for a future process of fair and even allocation that may never come. Don Juan, for example, described how he had recently 'grabbed' himself a seven-*manzana* parcel within the (theoretically off-limits) pine forest, in an effort to secure his claim to a full *derecho* in the face of this perception that before long other *socios* would have sold the whole cooperative, leaving him with less than his share. With almost all of the rest of the cooperative's title already claimed, the pine forest in

particular has recently been subject to numerous such efforts to secure a full *derecho* in the face of the perceived threat to a future division.

Such efforts can be understood, I suggest, as a negotiation of the ambiguities emerging within *derecho*-as-land; the tensions arising from *derecho* as an abstract, yet-to-be-realised future possibility or entitlement, and actually-possessed land in the present. These distinct temporal framings of *derecho*, though quite distinct, were at times blurred. One practical ramification of the way in which these distinct aspects of *derecho* are in everyday discourse frequently tangled, for example, was revealed in accounts of the process of applications for the FSLN's *Bono Productivo*, a state welfare program to be explored in more detail in later chapters. Part of the process of qualifying for this program involved participating in an initial evaluation undertaken by state agricultural technicians (*técnicos*). The *técnicos* were required to verify that applicants possessed sufficient land to provide pasture for the cow would be allocated as part of the program, but not so much land that they were deemed insufficiently needy to qualify. Many applicant families, filling in the questionnaires with the assistance of the technicians, responded that they possessed ten *manzanas* per *socio*. Giving the impression that, for example, a household with two *socios* possessed twenty *mazanas* of land as personal property, such applicants immediately disqualified themselves from standing as beneficiaries of the program. The land referred to in their responses, however, was the potential, theoretical entitlement within the cooperative, far in excess of what they actually held and worked personally. Eliding any distinction between their *derecho* as present actuality as opposed to theoretical entitlement and future possibility—an elision also sometimes encountered in everyday conversation—obstructed their applications for state assistance. I encountered comparable ambiguities when conducting a preliminary census in the village. In one household, I asked a man how much land he possessed and he had stated, simply, 'ten *manzanas*'. Overhearing her husband's response, doña Maria scoffed, and interjected that the figure was nonsense. 'He doesn't have

anything', she insisted, 'nothing at all'. Her husband continued to affirm, however, that he possessed ten *manzanas* of land in the cooperative. Though I was initially confused, it later became clear that each was making reference to a distinct aspect of the notion of *derecho*; on the one had theoretical entitlement, on the other, actually-possessed land.

Perhaps most significant in fuelling people's anxieties is the sense that *because* of this elision, *derecho* can be sold without any permanently tangible ramifications. Actually-possessed land, if sold, is of course gone. *Derecho* as an entitlement derived from membership appears, in the concerns of villagers, however, to be able to be sold without that basic alienation necessarily taking place; a *socio* can still claim to be grabbing further land within their *derecho*, potentially recouping what they have sold. Efforts to grab a full *derecho* as soon as possible stand in part as a struggle to counter this spectre of the tangible asset of land being dissolved by the intangibility of abstract entitlement. *Derecho* as entitlement which needs to be secured through *agarrando* has no inherent limit, unlike land as a physical object. The explosion of *agarrando* in the community, then, can to a significant extent be understood as an effort to escape the dangers posed by this key tension; an ongoing project of rendering intangible possibility as concrete actuality, fuelled by concerns crystallised in the image, frequently conjured in everyday conversation, of the *socio* who grabs, sells, and grabs again.

Land types

Another layer of complexity is added to this situation by the fact that the cooperative's full land title comprises a variety of distinct categories of terrain with different climatic qualities and legal statuses, varying commercial values and differing levels of productivity. Very broadly, people distinguish between mountain, forest and hot / agricultural land (*lo caliente /arado*). The mountain land comprises higher-altitude land with various histories. Some consists of land that was planted

with coffee in hacienda days, other areas comprise formerly uncultivated lands that have now been brought into use by cooperative members, predominantly for coffee cultivation. Often this had served as pasture in pre-revolutionary days but had reverted to forest in the years of disuse prior to the establishment of the cooperative, when the dangers of the civil war made cultivation undesirable. Similarly, some of what is now considered mountain land was in the early days of the cooperative still used as pasture, but has since grown over now that the cooperative's dairy herd has been sold. Part of the mountain area has been designated 'untouchable' (*intocable*) for personal cultivation due to environmental restrictions imposed by municipal authorities; surrounding communities depend upon streams which have their source within the cooperative's territory, and the aim is to prevent cultivation or clearance of timber which could threaten water supplies.

The forest land consists of a commercially-exploited pine forest that is managed by the cooperative leadership, and comprises a considerable portion of the cooperative's title. It is similarly, in theory, considered 'untouchable'—in other words it is widely viewed as being out of bounds for *socios* to establish personal claims upon it. As already mentioned, this has not, however, prevented numerous *socios* in recent years fencing off areas and claiming them as part of their own *derecho*, either with the intention of using them as grazing land for animals or with the hope of staking a future claim to the parcel in the event of a legal dismemberment of the collective title. The agricultural land, lower in altitude and suitable for pasture and the cultivation of maize and beans, comprises the remainder of the title.

These distinctions between distinct kinds of land play a muted but significant role in local understandings of notional shares of the cooperative's total holdings. As has been stated, efforts to fully realise *derecho*-as-land, and evaluations of present holdings in relation to total entitlements, generally operate in relation to a somewhat abstract conception of a *derecho* figured as a set area; generally, ten or twelve *manzanas*. When accounting for this figure, *socios* generally describe it as having

been arrived at through a division of the cooperative's total land area by the number of *socios*. A group who renounced cooperative membership, to be discussed below, despite no longer formally being members, are still included in this total number. The crucial point here is that the notional share operative in some of the ways of relating to ideas about *derecho* described above take no account of these distinctions between different types of land.

This point was raised to me by Wilber, whose father is a *socio* of the cooperative. Speaking about the difficulties that would arise if the cooperative were ever to divide, he pointed out that some *socios* have grabbed themselves ten *manzanas* of prime mountain land. He gave the example of José Alfaro. If you speak to José, he suggested, he'll just tell you that he's simply got his *derecho*. But what about all the other people who don't have any mountain land at all? If the cooperative is divided, Wilber asked, will they just be left without any share of the best land available? Will people like José be forced to give up some of what they have grabbed? As Wilber argued, either some *socios* will have to give up what they have already grabbed, or others will be unfairly left with the least desirable land, some of it barely suitable for cultivation, some of it subject to municipal restrictions. Either way, he insisted, any formal process of division in the future would inevitably generate extreme tension.

'Los Revueltos' and *derecho*-as-duty

This sense that future formal division of the cooperative may be an impending possibility has been in part provoked by the recent effort of a group of members to separate themselves from the cooperative and gain legal title to their holdings. A group of around seventy *socios*, who came to be known locally as '*los Revueltos*',⁶⁶

⁶⁶ A brief comment should be made about the term *Revueltos*. The word means 'mixed together', but is pertinent in the Nicaraguan context in that it was used to refer to groups of rearmed combatants

renounced their membership of Rigoberto Cruz in approximately 2004,⁶⁷ and demanded their own, individual land title to parcels *already* in their possession.

The movement was itself sparked in part by concerns regarding vulnerability of *derecho* within the cooperative. A deal had been arranged between the cooperative *directiva* and a foreign individual working as a representative of an NGO. The NGO specialised in promoting ‘community-based tourism’, and saw Gualiqueme as having the potential to tap into the increasingly lucrative tourist market. Gualiqueme boasted a substantial unused building; a large breeze-block edifice constructed by the Sandinista government prior to 1990 with the intention of it functioning as a collectivised day-care centre, to enable mothers to participate fully in cooperative labour obligations. The building had never operated in that capacity, however, as the civil war’s increasing financial burden on the Sandinista state, and eventually their electoral defeat, prevented these plans from being realised. The aim of the NGO’s project was to transform this defunct building into a cooperative-managed hotel. Communication regarding the intended nature of the project was evidently poor, however, and amid the climate of instability and anxiety following the civil war, the fear spread that the *directiva* had ‘sold’ part of the cooperative’s land to foreigners assumed to be ‘North Americans’. The possibility that wealthy Americans would proceed to buy out all the cooperative’s members and leave them landless crystallised existing concerns about corruption and mismanagement within the cooperative, and

who were active in the early 1990s, which consisted of disgruntled former Sandinistas (*recompas*) and former Resistance militants (*recontras*), whose disappointments with government promises of land and other benefits in the post-war era led them to operate together. That the term was used locally to refer to this group perhaps simply indicates temporal coincidence; this group renounced cooperative membership around the time of the political activity of *Revueltos* groups, and so their group came to be branded with a convenient label with discursive prominence at the time. It also, though, indicates the extent to which political identities came into play in the situation, such that status as a proper Sandinista was put under threat by being involved in an action perceived to be opposed to the Sandinista cooperative. The name was by no means embraced by the group itself, given these loaded connotations, but I use it here to emphasise the politically charged atmosphere of these events.

⁶⁷ I was unable to ascertain the exact date of this event.

prompted the group of *socios* to organise in order to demand legal title to protect their own *derecho*.

The *directiva* of the time refused to grant the group's demands, however, which stipulated that these members should be given individual titles to the parcels they in fact occupied at that time: parcels which were dispersed throughout the total land title of the cooperative as a whole, and which had come into the personal possession of particular members through the dual process of allocation and *agarrando* described above. The conflict that ensued brought into play key notions of unity and collectivity, and revolved around various overlapping and opposed constructions of the notion of *derecho*. In particular, the idea that *derecho*-as-membership and its associated entitlements to land come hand in hand with obligations to fulfil certain duties towards the cooperative itself has been a key point of reference in the dispute.

When the cooperative *directiva* were presented with the group's demands, they eventually proposed a settlement comparable to the agreement reached with the El Zapote group, as described above. This involved offering to cede the group a section of the cooperative's land title, which would be legally separated from the collective title, and would correspond in size to the sum of the group's members' *derechos* (i.e., a quantity of the total land proportional to the number of members). Those who had left the cooperative would have then been free to distribute shares of that section among themselves and independently pursue the possibility of legal measurement and titling. The proposal would necessarily have involved members of that group giving up lands they had cultivated within the cooperative's collective title, and the deal was also conditional upon them physically leaving the village and residing within the separated section of land, as the El Zapote group had done. This requirement to give up residence was explained to me by those Rigoberto Cruz *socios* supportive of the original proposals as being a self-explanatory and unavoidable stipulation for a cooperative to demand in order to retain its unity, because a

cooperative is singular (*es un solo*); such unity and singularity was viewed as threatened by any prospect of individual titles being granted within the area of collective title.

The majority of *los Revueltos*, however, were uninterested in relocating, or in giving up entitlement to the lands they had already cultivated and invested in. The lands they were offered, some argued, were of lower quality than those they were required to forfeit, being ‘hot’, lower-altitude agricultural land suitable for maize and bean production or pasture, as opposed to the more temperate and humid mountain land they already possessed, much of it planted with coffee.⁶⁸ They continued to insist that they be given legal individual title to the lands they already had taken possession of within the cooperative’s collective title. One group of eleven individuals accepted the *directiva*’s offer, however. That smaller group did indeed relocate, and land exchanges were arranged between them and other cooperative members (sometimes family members) in order to enable them to realise their *derecho* outside of the cooperative’s boundaries. The sentiment that having renounced cooperative membership meant having renounced any right to continue living in the village emerged in everyday interactions with the two members of the group who remained or returned to reside in the village; both described having been the target for many months of malicious gossip and general disapproval.

Those who had not accepted this deal arranged with a lawyer to represent them, in an effort to claim a legal right to individual title over their already-worked lands. At the time of fieldwork this dispute had to an extent fallen dormant, due to the inability of the *Revueltos* to further incur the expense of pursuing their legal case. The continuing, and somewhat tense, coexistence of cooperative members along with former members who had renounced their membership within the organisation

⁶⁸ It should be noted that although some considered mountain land to be unambiguously of greater value, given its suitability for the cultivation of coffee for export, others expressed preferences for lower-altitude lands.

while retaining possession of cooperative lands, however, functioned to continually bring competing definitions of *derecho* to the surface of everyday discourse. Mauricio, who at the time of our conversation had recently been elected vice-president of the cooperative, explained to me that the *Revueltos*, having renounced their cooperative membership, and having failed to since meet any of the collective duties of cooperative members from that point onwards—attendance at meetings and participation in collective work days in the pine forest in particular—had in theory legally forfeited their right, their *derecho*, to any of the benefits attendant upon cooperative membership, *including* access to or possession of the land. In his understanding, it was the cooperative itself as an organisation that possessed the land and granted entitlement to it; the access of any given member to a particular parcel was only secured through fulfilling the broader requirements of being a *socio*. He acknowledged that the cooperative had made no direct attempt to remove any of the *Revueltos* from their possession of cooperative lands, but argued that other benefits, viewed here as similarly concomitant with and contingent upon being a full member, could not possibly be extended to this group given their renunciation and non-participation. Such benefits included the profits from the cooperative's collectively-managed commercial forest, along with access to the benefits of state and NGO projects for which the cooperative functioned as an intermediary (cf. Chapter 6). In the model implicit in such arguments, cooperative capital and benefits are granted by the state to the organisation as such, and only through being a proper cooperative member does any particular individual qualify for access to these benefits. Clearly, any notion that access to lands within the cooperative is something earned by fulfilling membership requirements, duties, or ideals of Sandinista collectivity, starkly contrasts with the views commonly expressed regarding the process of *agarrando*, described above. That perspective, far more widely articulated by Gualiqueme residents, primarily locates the legitimacy of ownership and entitlement to possession in the labour-intensive personal effort of opening land for cultivation and continuing to work it.

It was indeed the case, as Mauricio implied, that the Rigoberto Cruz *directiva* no longer considered members of the *Revueltos* eligible for some benefits over which they had allocative control. For those on the receiving end of these exclusions, an emphasis on the definitions of entitlement understood to inhere in the struggle of everyday labour has been cultivated, stressing the extent to which their own position depends upon their own capacity to work, rather than being due to any advantages enabled by connections with the cooperative or other comparable institutions. One resident of the village, Emilio—one of the *Revueltos* who refused to accept the *directiva*'s proposed settlement—has proudly displayed in front of his house a sign proclaiming that the building was being constructed exclusively through his own efforts (*casa en construcción con efuerzo propia* [sic]). While almost all village residents have built their own houses, many have received zinc roofing panels from the state as part of Ortega's *Plan Techo* (Roof Plan). Emilio's emphasis on his own *fuerza* as being capable of rendering him independent of such forms of assistance stands as a clear effort to prioritise forms of efficacy which require no involvement with external institutional capacities or powers. Constructions of *derecho*-as-land, which restrict ideas of entitlement to the struggle of working the land itself, and construe eligibility as contingent upon the sweat of labour, can be comparably viewed as part of an effort to *separate* eligibilities from any sense of *derecho* as integrally dependent upon cooperative membership.

In a context, however, where notions of efficacy grounded in personal struggle generally stand together with conceptions of productivity and power as something deriving from access to external sources of assistance, as something supervening and distant—constructions with widespread local purchase in social, political and religious domains—this has not been a satisfactory solution for everyone. Later chapters will explore more fully the ways in which efforts have been made by those excluded from access to cooperative benefits to re-establish



Figure 14—Sign reads ‘house under constuction with my own effort’

appropriate connections with the distant agency of presidential power (cf., in particular, Chapter 7). What I would like to explore here are the ways in which such strategies draw upon and formulate distinct notions of *derecho*, as depending not upon mere membership in the cooperative, but as resting primarily upon the foundation of an encompassing identity as a Sandinista.

Sandinista *derecho*

Speaking about the actions described above of sons-of-*socios* and in-marrying men—whose strategies of accessing land, as already discussed, have been formulated in relation to particular notions of *derecho*—don Erwin pointed out that these actions have by no means been well received by some older cooperative members. Some of the younger people in the cooperative and in the village, those who have married in and those who are children of *socios*, he explained, didn't directly experience the war. They didn't suffer as we suffered. They have heard about it through the words of their parents, but for all they know it never really happened. It is only the older *socios*, he insisted, who lived through the suffering of war. Erwin's words articulated a perception of disjunction and paradox in a scenario where people who didn't directly suffer in the war nevertheless benefit (*logran*) from their position in the cooperative, whether that was achieved through marriage or through having become a *socio* more recently. This perception of strangeness, clearly, revolves around the sense that the entitlement to land and other benefits that constitutes one's *derecho* was something forged in the suffering of war.

On another occasion, Erwin's wife Esperanza—who we met above as one of those who left the cooperative having accepted the *directiva's* proposed deal with the *Revueltos*—insisted in a conversation that because she was yet to fully claim her *derecho-as-land* (she considered herself to have several *manzanas* of her entitlement still unrealised), she was still a *socia* of the cooperative. Her son, listening in, insisted that it was obviously the case that she was *not* a *socia*, because she had renounced her membership as part of her involvement with 'los *Revueltos*'. Esperanza responded with anger, supporting her claim by shouting at her son that 'we were the ones who won it!' Here, Esperanza conflates membership in the cooperative with entitlement to one's *derecho* as a share of the total land, but roots such entitlement in the experience of having participated in and lived through the violence of both the revolutionary uprising and the subsequent civil war. Seeing the land as recompense

for the suffering that was required to achieve victory, and to defend the nation against the enemy (*el enemigo*)—and depicting the point of that victory as securing the delivery of land taken to be the revolution’s prize—such understandings view *derecho* as a claim to land that has been *painfully* gained through war and struggle.



Figure 15—A Gualaqueme resident shows badges awarded to ‘historic collaborators’ of the FSLN

This rooting of eligibility in suffering has been cultivated institutionally within the FSLN in Nicaragua over the course of recent decades, but also by subsequent administrations. Perhaps most substantially, the effort at demobilisation undertaken by the government of Violeta de Chamorro in the 1990s revolved around the distribution of land to disarmed combatants (Close, 1999). While tremendous quantities of land were indeed distributed to such individuals—more land in terms of total area than was distributed by the Sandinista government between 1979-1990 (Close, 1999)—many were left dissatisfied. Much rural politics in Nicaragua in recent years has been framed in these terms; claims based on assertions of eligibility grounded in military participation. But in addition, various internal statuses signifying such forms of participation have been established and certified within the

FSLN—‘mothers of heroes and martyrs’, and ‘historic collaborators’ for instance—which have situated eligibility for key institutional benefits in past revolutionary participation and consequent suffering (on the mothers of heroes and martyrs organisations, see de Volo, 2001). Mothers of martyrs qualify for pensions, and certification as a historic collaborator is widely viewed as strengthening the case of individuals applying for pensions or other forms of state assistance. Informally, efforts to solicit assistance within the political structures of the FSLN have similarly revolved around this assumption of personal suffering as a foundation of entitlement. In one political meeting I attended, members of ‘*los Revueltos*’ defended their actions to the mayor, and argued that their actions should not disqualify them from other state benefits. Their statements were invariably prefaced by recounting key personal experiences of suffering or loss related to the war; a brother killed in action, a child who died serving in the EPS (the Sandinista Popular Army), a personal injury sustained during combat. Such demonstrations, taken as clear arguments that renouncing membership of the cooperative should not jeopardise entitlement to any other benefits, clearly indicate this effort to frame *derecho* as standing on a foundation of a militarised Sandinista subjectivity, a subject position forged through revolutionary participation and the suffering of war, and therefore independent of the cooperative, and invulnerable to any exclusions effected by it as an institution.

Significantly, such constructions of *derecho* ground entitlements in a status—the subject position of one who has fought and suffered—which, in the contemporary era, already exists as an established fact. Rather than viewing eligibility as based in an *ongoing* performance of duties within the cooperative (and consequently something which could in theory be lost), or on the ongoing performance of the laborious cultivation of land, eligibility is here construed as founded upon an identity that is



Figure 16—Poster on the right is an official document presented by the FSLN in recognition of participation in the revolutionary effort to topple Somoza. Name removed to preserve anonymity.

permanent, and the exclusions described above, which revolve around constructions of *derecho*-as-duty, are thereby cast as illegitimate. I will return to this particular mode of constructing eligibility in Chapter 7, in which I will explore a case study of the more recent political endeavours of some residents of the field site which are rooted in this particular construction of *derecho*.

Conclusion

At present, then, Rigoberto Cruz Cooperative remains with legally-collective title, but with just the area of pine forest still worked and managed collectively. Almost all the other land within the collective title is either claimed by members, former members, their kin, or ‘outsiders’ who have, more recently, purchased it from any of those categories of resident. Individuals who have been involved in the tense conflicts described above continue to live and labour in close proximity. The general expectation prevails that sooner or later the land will, somehow or other, be legally divided up; but exactly what this would entail or what the outcome would be remains uncertain. Some speak ominously of this prospect, predicting an inevitable period of violence and disruption as some individuals are compelled to relinquish land they have acquired, land which they are expected to jealously defend. Others speak optimistically of a simple process of rationalisation and fair allocation. What is certain, as has been shown above, is that anticipation of various possible future outcomes has crucially informed the way people have acted upon notions of *derecho* in the present.

It has been seen that the ongoing negotiation of everyday relations with land among members and former members of the cooperative as they enact distinct conceptions of *derecho* have drawn upon divergent understandings of entitlement, overlapping and at times opposed definitions of power and productivity, and have brought potent articulations of political identity into play. Entitlement has been constructed in opposing ways as depending upon on the one hand *fuerza*, the immanent productive capacity of male labour, and on the other hand the administrative and allocative potential of supervening institutions; at times the cooperative, at others municipal FSLN authorities or the national Sandinista government. This dialectic of entitlement maps on to what we have been referring to as a pervasive ‘dilemma’ in local theories of efficacy. On the one hand, eligibilities are rooted in productive capacities viewed as generated by the possibilities of the

labouring body. Crucially, in the case of the formulations of Sandinista subjectivity just discussed, an equivalence or elision is established between entitlements grounded in the labouring body, and those grounded in the suffering of living through the war, or participating in the revolution. On the other hand, eligibility is constructed as depending on an external administrative power that particular persons must establish themselves in an appropriate relation to, with eligibility only ever guaranteed through appropriate enactment of positions of involvement, mutuality, even 'dependency' in relation to such potencies. This key accommodation between constructions of efficacy as based upon the immanent capacity to struggle, and conceptions of productivity which envisage sources of power as displaced or external will be seen in later chapters to play a comparably crucial role in local engagements with wider political contexts and evaluations of local political leadership.

It is worth noting, finally, that the notion of entitlement as guaranteed by the allocative and distributive authority of supervening agencies has itself been construed at different scales; with eligibility seen at times as coming from and guaranteed by the cooperative, at others as coming from encompassing political entities such as the FSLN or the president himself. As members have struggled to establish claims and eligibilities, competing visions of Sandinista subjectivity have been articulated and asserted in relation to these distinct scales. And these varying conceptions of productivity and power have been enacted in relation to the possibilities emerging from the material qualities of land itself, along with the everyday dynamics of kinship. It is to a closer exploration of the everyday dynamics of kinship and the mutual interplay between household relations, understandings of efficacy and productivity, and local political imaginaries that this thesis will turn in the following chapter.

Chapter 5—*Vicio* and everyday domestic relations

As was mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, shifts away from agricultural collectivism in Nicaragua—as across Latin America—are frequently analysed in terms of ‘individualist’ pressures, either from above or below. The previous chapter made clear some of the reasons why, in relation to negotiations surrounding access to and ownership of land within the cooperative’s collective title, such characterisations fail to capture what is at stake for participants themselves in these processes. It was argued there that close attention to local constructions of entitlement—bound up with prevailing understandings of efficacy and power—is required to adequately describe such negotiations surrounding access to land.

This chapter will explore another phenomenon that appears similarly vulnerable to being analytically engulfed by the assumption that individualising processes comprise the core of recent Nicaraguan history; namely the rising trend towards Evangelical forms of Christianity throughout Latin America (García-Ruiz and Michel, 2010; Martin and Berger, 1990; Stoll, 1990).⁶⁹ Interpretations are often cast in terms of an opposition between (new) individualism and (old) collectivism as *the* fundamental post-cold war dynamic. The new concerns of recently-converted Evangelicals are often viewed as mutually entangled in these macroscopic shifts, causing and caused by developments at a global level (Rocha, 2012, provides one such analysis in the case of Nicaragua). Neoliberal, market-oriented individuals are understood to be forged amid putative concerns with salvation, spiritual purity and separation from worldly concerns (cf. Haynes, 2012, who makes a comparable

⁶⁹ As is standard in Latin Americanist scholarship, I use the term ‘Evangelical’ to refer generally to new forms of Protestantism, in view of the fact that *evangélico* stands as the most common term of self-identification employed across Latin America (Garrard-Burnett and Stoll, 1993). In Nicaragua, as throughout the continent, the majority of recently established Evangelical churches are neo-Pentecostal denominations, but as Rocha (2012) notes, members very rarely identify explicitly with the term ‘neo-Pentecostal’. But see Robbins (2004, p119) for a discussion of some of the ‘terminological confusion’ which can arise from this widely-adopted convention.

observation in relation to Africanist literature). With the shift from the collective organisation of the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative to the cultivation of personal or family plots within the collective title as documented in the previous chapter, it is perhaps tempting to view the rising ‘wave’⁷⁰ of Pentecostalism as part and parcel of the same broad historical dynamic; a broad post-Cold War shift to an atomised and flexible globalised society in which no state structures mediate between the individual and the international market, and in which new religious preferences both mould and mirror this individualistic orientation.

To give some examples of this broad analytical perspective, Garcia Ruiz and Michel (2010) analyse Pentecostal developments in relation to such globalising processes, reading them ‘both as an indicator of the reorganisations underway and a means of managing them’ (p411). In their recent study, they aim to trace ‘the production, through religion, of an individuation compatible with the processes of globalisation underway, in other words [examining] the way that the new Evangelical community institutions tend to produce a globalised individual, following a fully integrated market logic’ (p411). Comparably, in a highly-cited study David Martin refers back to Max Weber to argue that neo-Pentecostalism can be understood to be forming new subjectivities compatible with contemporary capitalist processes: ‘By moulding individuals with some sense of their own selfhood and capacity to choose, it may well be building up a constituency well-disposed to a capitalistic form of development’ (Martin and Berger, 1990, p231). And Bernice Martin (1995, p110) has argued that neo-Pentecostal conversion among subaltern Latin Americans contributes to the cultivation of forms of ‘survival entrepreneurship’ crucial in negotiating the flexible labour regime of a neoliberal epoch; ‘protestant self-discipline in this dispensation is a distinct survival aid’ (see also Annis, 1987).

⁷⁰ Indeed, both neoliberalism and neo-Pentecostalism appear to invite a descriptive imagery of floods, tides, waves, and even ‘tsunamis’. Cf. Ong (2007) for a critique of the implications of such metaphors in accounts of neoliberalism.

In line with the argument pursued throughout this thesis, however, it will be suggested in this chapter that this identification of social phenomena as best evaluated in accordance with an underlying historical ontology in which opposition between individualist and collectivist forms comprises the key political, historical and social dynamic should be treated with caution. There is the danger that such analyses speak more to our own ideological and evaluative criteria than to the local priorities revealed by ethnography. Ethnographic exploration of the way in which Evangelical concerns have been incorporated into local life, this chapter will argue, demands that they be situated in relation to prevailing constructions of personhood, efficacy and power. The way in which the possibility of productivity is locally conceptualised and enacted must be taken into account. And as will be seen, certain key assumptions about the domestic realm and the nature of the human potentials that contribute towards the emergence of the household play a key role in structuring the pressing anxieties which emergent Evangelical discourses promise to address.

Such a strategy, it must be acknowledged, leads towards a perspective which implicitly takes issue with Joel Robbins' influential injunction to be cautious about employing analytic tools which stand in tension with the discursive formulations of Pentecostal Christians (Robbins, 2003, 2007). Informants' perspectives must be taken seriously as Robbins recommends, it will be suggested here, but not simply at face value. Despite local Evangelicals' claims to have *separated* themselves fully from 'the world' (*el mundo*) that surrounds them, it will be shown that the specific texture of insecurity which informs their spiritual practice is entirely congruent with the problematic requirements of domesticity as locally constructed; longstanding conditions of household productivity which prevail generally and are by no means specifically Evangelical. Such an argument does not, I contend, amount to what Robbins characterises as a denial of novelty, an analytic incapacity to allow for the possibility of cultural change. Rather, it is simply based upon the recognition that novel perspectives—even perspectives based upon claims of newness, novelty and

transformation—take hold and establish their conceptual purchase within contexts not entirely of their own creation. The problems to which Evangelical practice provides a plausible solution, it will be shown, emerge out of a framework of assumptions that are general and which, for my informants, pre-date and exceed their putatively transformative conversions.⁷¹

The description which will be developed here of local understandings of productivity in relation to domestic relations, while crucial for understanding the form taken by Evangelical concerns regarding ‘vice’ (*vicio*), will also be an essential step along the way towards understanding local involvements with the ‘assistentialist’ (Montoya, 2012a) institutional frameworks currently prevailing in rural Nicaragua; phenomena which will comprise the topics of later chapters. As will be seen, making sense of Evangelical concerns with *vicio* requires us to take into account key local theories of efficacy that are crucially relevant for involvements with that more immediately ‘political’ domain of practice. I focus specifically on the notion of *vicio* both because of this relevance to the broader discussion of the thesis, but also simply because it was a theme that was strikingly present in everyday conversation and commentary, and not only among Evangelicals.⁷² For Evangelicals and others, the idea of *vicio* has come to constitute a pervasive lens through which social and moral ills are analysed and evaluated. But rather than standing as novel problems emerging purely from the theological claims of Evangelical Christianity itself, the anxieties addressed by ideas of *vicio* can, I argue, best be understood as products of prevailing ideas about proper domestic organisation, and the quotidian forms of productivity involved.

⁷¹ The issue of rupture and continuity has, indeed, been a central debate within the anthropology of Christianity (Engelke, 2010; Robbins, 2003, 2004, 2007).

⁷² In developing this emphasis, Gualiqueme Evangelicals reflect the concerns prevailing in the neo-Pentecostal movement across Latin America, as Bernice Martin (1995, p116) makes clear.

This chapter, then, will explore the potent local purchase of this concept of *vicio* in relation to local ways of imagining the possibilities of domesticity. In particular, it will explore the ways that the popularity of ideas concerning the dangers of *vicio* make explicit a dilemma of efficacy emerging from a particular construction of domesticity as the appropriate and complementary containment of gendered potentials, potentials that are always prone to excess. The chapter will proceed by investigating *vicio* as a novel way of articulating and attempting to resolve the potent insecurities that emerge out of these ideals, and the key assumptions that inform them. Discourses of *vicio*, I suggest, reveal and resonate with the fact that ideals of domesticity are grounded in a tenuous containment, the conjecture that productive relations emerge from the delicate and precarious balance of inherently volatile forces which remain always liable to escape.

It will therefore be necessary to provide an account of what is considered to be at stake in rural models of co-dependency that play into the creation of households; to describe the gendered notions of productivity, fertility, and creative potential that inform such constructions. This discussion of domesticity will also be crucial in developing an account of theories of efficacy more generally, and later chapters will show political involvements to share key premises with the concerns of the household. Central to these parallels is the fact that effective domestic action depends upon securing an appropriate relation of incorporation and involvement with sources of power and potential across a fundamental distance; here, constituted by the categorical divide of gender. Rather than the realisation of a capacity internal to the actor, household productivity depends upon working to properly perform forms of mutuality which negotiate that divide. It will be seen in later chapters that political practice for Gualiqueme residents is also held to be contingent upon the viable mediation of distance. First, however, the chapter will provide a brief account of the place of Evangelical Christianity in the community, describing the different groups which have emerged in recent years, and give a descriptive account of the way

involvement with Pentecostal groups affects everyday life for converts and others. It will proceed, through a pair of ethnographic vignettes, to describe a number of characteristic instances where ideas of *vicio* were articulated, and will go on to analyse these paradigmatic iterations of the concept in relation to prevailing ideals of domesticity.

Evangelicals in Gualiqueme

As afternoon sets in and people return from the fields, Gualiqueme fills with the sound of electronic piano and loudly amplified singing emanating from Evangelical services (*cultos*), held either in one of the two small ‘temples’ (*templos*), or in someone’s private residence. Not infrequently, when the churches hold ‘campaigns’ (*campañas*)—special open events aimed at bringing in new converts and welcoming members of different denominations—such celebrations go on until after the majority of villagers have gone to sleep. But on ordinary evenings the music will start at a few hours before dusk at 4 or 5pm, and will continue until between 7 and 9pm.

The constant activity of Evangelical worship and daily practice has become a significant part of everyday life in the village. There are at present two main Pentecostal groups who have established *templos* in the village (and between which there is moderate competition for converts, along with theological disagreement); each has a congregation of approximately twenty-five people, many of whom attend *cultos* every evening of the week and Saturday, and all day on Sunday. Congregants consider committed daily attendance to be crucial; those who attend intermittently tend to be peripheral to the activities of the two most established groups.

From the perspective of pastors, the process of creating a congregation combines religious vocation with the prospect of establishing a viable career, and each of the larger churches with *templos* stands as the result of many years of work, combining



Figure 17—Evangelical service (*culto*) taking place in one of Gualiqueme's two '*templos*'.

different kinds of contributions; both assistance 'from below', from congregants, and assistance 'from above', secured from municipal authorities and international networks of church funding. Committed in theory to the giving the biblical tithe (*diezmo*) of ten percent of one's income to the church, most of the active groups aspire to sustain the pastor's position economically through contributions from congregants.⁷³ This ideal was hard to live up to in an economically precarious rural

⁷³ One of the more itinerant pastors who sustained a very small congregation in the village, comprising a few members of one family, sustained a critique of this substantial demand for the *diezmo*. He made an effort to appeal to the financially-precarious members of his small group by stressing the fact that he considered contributions to be entirely voluntary and that very small donations were sufficient if that was all that was available. Other groups frequently made explicit demands on members to contribute certain amounts of money to pay for expenses, such as one appeal

community, however, and most of the pastors I knew needed to supplement their income either through subsistence farming, occasional day labour, or itinerant trade.

In addition to the two larger and more established groups, a number of smaller congregations are active in the village, holding *cultos* in private residences under the leadership of pastors who generally travel from the nearby town Condega. There were two such groups that I was aware of during the time of my research, in one case with a membership comprising just a few members of one family, with the other group attracting a slightly larger congregation. A very few Evangelical residents of the village—for reasons of personal preference or family affinity—also travel occasionally to attend other *cultos* held by different groups in neighbouring villages, rather than being a member of the nearer groups.

While some Catholic Gualiqueme residents downplay the demographic significance of Evangelicals in the village—Jairo Torres, for example, a leading member of the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative's *directiva*, insisted that there were 'just a few families' who had converted—many local estimates place the proportion of Catholics to Evangelicals at around half and half. It is certainly the case that observant Evangelicals are perhaps disproportionately visible locally, as Jairo suggested, with daily services and extravagantly loud music making their performances of commitment impossible to ignore. But Evangelicals themselves tend to emphasise their own numerical strength, pointing out that people are considered 'Catholic' by default, and that many individuals who so describe themselves are

I witnessed for congregants to cover the travel costs and fees for the pastor to attend religious training sessions held in Managua. On several occasions when attending *cultos* at one of these larger churches, I heard senior members of the church spend considerable time reminding people of the importance of making these contributions in order to facilitate the development of the pastor, and by extension the church.

hardly religiously observant, never attending church services, and unrestrainedly indulging in ‘sinful’ practices such as drinking.⁷⁴

Devoted Evangelicals are often visibly marked by their attention to sartorial discipline, and church members make their way to the daily services each evening



Figure 18—Evangelical service (*culto*) taking place in the home of a member of the congregation. Keyboard and amplification system have been carried over from the *templo*.

dressed smartly—men usually in shirts, trousers and shoes, women ideally in long dresses reaching down to the ankle and modest tops, with their hair tied up⁷⁵—many of them carrying their personal copy of the New Testament.

⁷⁴ In this analysis Gualiqueme Evangelicals are in accord with scholarly commentators, who frequently observe that while survey data consistently shows Catholics to significantly outnumber Evangelicals across Latin America, converts tend on average to exhibit much greater levels of commitment and participation in church-related activities. Many who respond to interviewers that they are Catholic take no frequent part in church activities, while most self-described Evangelicals are regular participants (Garrard-Burnett and Stoll, 1993; Martin and Berger, 1990).

⁷⁵ Tying up the hair for reasons of modesty is universally practiced among women in the village, however; not only among Evangelicals.

The daily services consist of a mixture of preaching and song, with members taking it in turn to exercise the 'privilege' (*privilegio*)⁷⁶ of singing into the microphone, accompanied by live keyboard, often with the keyboard's built-in drum machine keeping a beat, and with the congregation joining in with intensely enthusiastic clapping and singing. When the power supply is down—as it very frequently is—the loudly amplified music is replaced by acoustic guitar. Preaching is conducted primarily by the pastor, though leading members of the group who have earned the privilege take their turns to contribute to services, and occasionally lead events if the pastor is unable to attend. Young men hover around the entrance of the churches,⁷⁷ listening to the music, enjoying the activity—there are very few other focal points of social activity in the village in the evenings—but having no desire to commit themselves to the disciplined restrictions of full participation and membership.

⁷⁶ Members of each of the groups gradually acquire increasing levels of '*privilegio*' as they prove their disciplined commitment, gradually working their way up through a series of hierarchically-ordered statuses, with demotion down the ranks being a potential repercussion of slipping into *vicio*. Leading members of the group are responsible for policing this system and for enforcing penalties, and on various occasions over the course of this research individual members of different groups were punished for ethical infractions by having privileges removed. For example, a member known to have committed adultery or drunk alcohol might be stripped of their privileges and thus lose their right to sing or give readings in services for a specified number of weeks. Once the specified time had expired, and assuming no further infractions had been committed, privileges would be reinstated.

The elements of discipline and surveillance involved in this system of ethical enforcement were strikingly illustrated to me when I interviewed one of the local pastors. I recorded the interview using a digital recorder, and once the interview was completed, the pastor asked me how much such recorders cost and whether it would be possible for me to purchase another from the UK. It would be very useful, he explained, to be able to have recordings of some of the commitments and vows congregants make when joining the church or on other ritual occasions. If he had recordings of these ceremonies, he speculated, he would be able to hold people to account more effectively when they fall into sin. He gave the example of a recent incident that had taken place within his own congregation, where a married woman had 'committed adultery' with an Evangelical pastor from another village. If only he had a recording of her original ritual promises when she married, he said, he would be able to make the gravity of her sinful behaviour all the clearer to her.

⁷⁷ I use the term 'church' to here refer to the Pentecostal 'temples' (*templos*); but note that the word 'iglesia' (church) was never used by local Evangelicals to refer to their buildings of worship, reserving the term to signify the broad collectivity of the born-again faithful.

As already mentioned, *cultos* are also frequently held in the homes of church members, with the amplification systems, keyboards and microphones carried over from the *templo* and installed, a supply of plastic chairs borrowed for the event. Such home services might be held for a specific ritual purpose—for instance in an effort to cure the illness of a resident of the house—or as part of an effort to exorcise diabolic spirits (*espíritus satánicos*) understood to be causing misfortune in a congregant's personal life. They may be held in order to mark a child's birthday celebration, with the usual preaching and singing combined with a present-giving ceremony. Or they might simply be part of an effort among the group to rotate home *cultos* among members.

Encounters with Evangelical activity outside of the village contributes towards an awareness of the national and even international scale of the Pentecostal movement. When villagers travel to the city of Estelí, they will invariably encounter one of the many itinerant pastors who eke out a living preaching on the intercity buses. Numerous Evangelical radio stations are also available and can be accessed from the village, one of which is based in the nearby town of Condega. There are occasional large-scale events held in the town by famous preachers or Evangelical musical acts, and while most villagers cannot afford to pay for the tickets and bus fares that attendance would require, live broadcasts via radio stations allow them to tune in to these events. While these phenomena contribute towards the sense among participants that they are part of a global religious movement with a presence across Nicaragua, the religious life of Gualiqueme Evangelicals is predominantly centred within the village and nearby communities. Not irregularly, church members visit other congregations or themselves receive contingents from members of the same church in neighbouring villages.

The previous chapter documented some of the key social cleavages and conflicts that have played out within the cooperative, largely in relation to land. It is certainly the case that such tensions to an extent find another mode of expression

through individual choices about which religious groups to affiliate with in the village. One informant, Wilber (who we will meet again below)—himself a Catholic who had once briefly been a member of one of the Evangelical groups—suggested to me that in fact the *only* people who had become Evangelicals in Gualiqueme were those that had fallen out with the cooperative *directiva* over the course of trying to secure individual title to land. He pointed out that most of the key members of the cooperative leadership were Catholics, and argued that it was because of the tension between members of *los Revueltos* (see Chapter 4) and these dominant cooperative members that some had chosen to leave the Catholic church.

Some accounts of individual conversion that I collected confirmed the role of this kind of social tension in accounts of personal motivations to shift religious allegiance. Informants in some instances spoke of feeling unwelcome in Catholic ceremonies after having participated in political and legal efforts to secure individual title, and contrasted their experiences of ‘brotherhood’ and friendship in Evangelical practice with this past sense of judgemental exclusion. But such accounts were not limited to those who had been involved in the activities of the *Revueltos*—nor was it the case that cooperative members were exclusively Catholics.⁷⁸ And leading members of the *Revueltos* group—and the overlapping group of residents seeking political alignment with a neighbouring municipality (whose activities will be explored in Chapter 7)—are religiously mixed, comprising mainstream Catholics, *Eclesiales de Base* and Evangelicals. Nevertheless, Wilber’s characterisation captures the way in which for *some* individuals, changes in religious affiliation have stood as an expression of social tension and micropolitical alignment.

⁷⁸ Indeed, during the time of research one central member of one of the Evangelical groups was elected to the position of vice-president in the cooperative.

Vicio

Central to Evangelical practice and discourse are notions of ‘vice’ (*vicio*). Ideas about vice and sinfulness run through Evangelical social commentaries, accounts of personal conversion, interpretations of current events and ecological phenomena; they inform everyday cosmologies, and suffuse daily gossip and conversation. Indeed, this centrality of notions of sinfulness and its tremendous local purchase and popularity appears to have impacted on religious agendas in other groups. The Catholic Church holds weekly bible-reading groups, guided by printed hand-outs from the regional hierarchy, whose conversations are heavily focused on ideas of sin and salvation. Obviously such priorities are hardly alien to the Catholic tradition (cf., e.g., Pina-Cabral, 1986), but the parallel stress on sinfulness struck me as being part of a local ethical discourse whose effervescence exceeded the boundaries of any particular group. Even the *Eclesiales de Base* meetings—putatively operating in the tradition of liberation theology—were frequently filled with reference to ‘unreformed’ ideas about sinfulness and the prospect of damnation, and similarly appeared to be participating in this cross-denominational discourse. I certainly do not wish to attempt to sustain a causal argument about the direction of influence among these different groups; I simply want to make clear that ideas about *vicio* were potently resonant in Gualiqueme life, informing local evaluations in a range of contexts; and that while I will restrict attention here primarily to Evangelical articulations of *vicio*, the concept had purchase and spoke to pressing concerns beyond the boundaries of Pentecostal groups.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to make a historical argument, it should be noted that scholars of Latin America have made specific claims about the way concerns with domesticity have been affected historically by trends of conversion to Pentecostal forms of Christianity. As Robbins (2004) makes clear in a review article, it has been argued that the prioritisation of domestic models of productivity has shifted from traditionally being exclusively a female concern, to being a concern of both men and women, precisely because of the cultural effects of Evangelical conversion (e.g., Brusco, 1995).

It is important to make clear what is meant by ‘vice’ when Evangelicals use the term. People are often referring to particular ‘sinful’ behaviours; drinking alcohol, taking drugs, committing adultery, living in conjugal or sexual union without having married, swearing, wearing immodest or inappropriate clothing or make-up, dancing and participating in parties, fighting and being violent (Garrard-Burnett and Stoll, 1993). But such behaviours and practices also have a strong spatial association articulated in cosmological terms; they are activities that form and define involvement with ‘the world’ (*el mundo*). ‘The world’ is in part constructed in opposition to the celestial destination Pentecostals aim and expect to enter in the afterlife, but it also takes on concrete spatial correlates in relation to village life. It is the activity of the street or the sports field—where groups of men hang around in the evening hours after work or on Sundays, often smoking or drinking if money allows—as opposed to the life of the Church. It is the bars and brothels of the town, the men drinking bottles of *aguardiente* while riding the roof of the bus back to the village, the drunkenness of Semana Santa, the groups of young girls wearing low-cut tops, tight jeans and make-up, the regional patron saint celebrations (*fiestas patronales*) thronging with thieves and homosexuals.⁸⁰

Speaking of ‘the world’ during *cultos*, the pastor’s reference would often simply be to the world *out there*, beyond the building occupied by the congregation. Such differentiations informed everyday evaluations among congregants in ways that condensed references to particular spaces and to particular practices. On one occasion, for instance, an NGO organised an event in the village’s hotel, in which youths performed traditional Nicaraguan dances. I asked an Evangelical churchgoer whether he would be attending the event, and he laughed; of course he wouldn’t, he

⁸⁰ See Jamieson (2010, p416) for an account of comparable *fiestas* in Managua. On gay culture in Nicaragua, cf. Lancaster (1992). Lancaster describes the way in which, in the context of a broadly prevailing *machismo*, a significant number of gay men in Nicaragua adopt highly flamboyant and gender-transgressive public personas; these highly visible and theatrical displays of homosexuality, presumed to typify gay culture generally, tend to be the target of such evaluations among Gualaqueme Evangelicals. (See also Babb, 2003; Howe, 2002; Howe, 2013; Randall, 1993)

explained, there would be music and dancing, and those are part of ‘the world’. We don’t join in with such things, he stated. Evangelical practice and ritual is intended to achieve a complete *separation* from this sin-ridden world.

As has been well-documented in the literature (cf., Robbins, 2004, for a review), Pentecostal denominations tend to focus upon a stark division of almost all of life into the respective domains of God and Satan; the practices characterised as ‘*vicios*’ are firmly situated in the satanic domain of ‘the world’, which intensive rituals and strict prescriptions for personal discipline are intended to foster a complete separation from. Through these demanding engagements with Evangelical practice, individuals are taken to be able to foster a direct involvement with divine power; by means of the immediate embodiment of the Holy Spirit during prayer, and by rigorously relating every aspect of daily life to the text of the bible (Bielo, 2009). The perspective presented in this chapter, however, suggests that these forms of stabilising ritual identification with divine power gain their appeal for rural Nicaraguans from the extent to which they offer to resolve pertinent instabilities emerging from prevailing problems of domestic efficacy. In order to gain a richer sense of the ways in which ideas about *vicio* played into these problematic requirements of the household, I will proceed to present a number of case studies which I take to be characteristic moments and contexts in which notions of *vicio* offered this tantalising prospect of resolution.

Two cases

In this part of the chapter I will present two cases which I take to be insightful instances of the everyday use of notions of *vicio* by individuals each deeply involved in Evangelical practice, although in rather different ways. These comprise in one instance an Evangelical mother lamenting the sometimes erratic behaviour of her son, in the other a ‘leader’ (*líder*) of one of the larger Pentecostal groups in Gualiqueme recounting his susceptibility to sin prior to conversion. I will begin by

sketching the way in which *vicio* was discursively deployed in each case, and will proceed to analyse each instance in relation to the context I suggest is required to fully make sense of it; a discussion which demands attention to the everyday practices of domesticity, prevailing constructions of masculinity and femininity, and the intimate connection between these social stipulations and the forms of vulnerability and precariousness they produce.

Esperanza

Esperanza was an eager member of one of the smaller Evangelical groups active in the village. Her domestic duties didn't permit her to participate in the demanding schedules of the larger local groups, but she keenly cultivated a relationship with one of the few pastors that regularly travelled from town to hold *cultos* in the village. Every week or so, the pastor would hold a *culto* in her house, usually with just a few other members of her family in attendance. Though far from a model convert in the eyes of some of the village's more disciplined Evangelicals, Esperanza was evidently deeply committed to the ideals embodied by explicit Evangelical prescriptions, and made continual reference to key Evangelical themes in daily conversation; not least that of *vicio*.

Her unmarried son, Wilber, was still part of his parents' household at the time of research. Wilber's father Erwin was approaching seventy years of age, and although men never expect to retire in rural Nicaragua, his ability to work the fields was starting to reflect his age.⁸¹ Wilber's labour contributions, complementing the efforts of his father, *should* have been sufficient to provide the family with maize and beans for subsistence and a modest yearly harvest of coffee. But Esperanza was

⁸¹ Except in better-off families, men will generally continue to undertake agricultural work until they are physically incapable of doing so.

perennially anxious about the danger of Wilber falling prey to the temptations of *vicio*, and by no means considered his contributions reliable, or even likely.

To take one example of the way she illustrated her concerns about *vicio*, Esperanza spoke about an occasion several years past, when Wilber had taken out a loan from a microcredit bank, Banco Procredit, in order to try his luck at growing onions. He had been working with a friend, they had rented a field and had planted substantial quantities of the crop, investing considerably in expensive fertiliser and insecticides, all bought on credit. Initially it had appeared as if the venture was going to pay off, with the price of onions remaining tantalisingly high as the crop was coming to maturity. But then, the price began to plummet. Esperanza described how day after day, the price had gone down, and down. At last, after selling his harvest, Wilber was left with a debt of around 10,000 *córdobas*. Esperanza recalled how he said he planned to go to Costa Rica to work in order to earn enough to pay off the debt. He arranged with the bank for a two year extension of his credit and undertook the trip to Costa Rica. As Esperanza recounted the events, he returned in time and with enough money to pay off his renegotiated loan, which by that time had doubled, with accumulated interest, to 20,000 *córdobas*. One day he said he was heading to town to pay the loan, but the next they heard of it, Banco Procredit agents were coming round asking for Erwin, saying that Wilber still owed the money, and that as his father Erwin was legally liable. Look!, Esperanza exclaimed, he just went to town and drunk the whole load of cash away in one day in the bars, him and that load of slackers (*montón de vagos*) he hangs around with.

With the bank pursuing them for Wilber's unpaid loan, she and Erwin—helped by a contribution from their eldest daughter, who lives and works in Costa Rica—managed to get 1000 *córdobas* together in order to pay a first instalment on the loan. They gave Wilber the money to pay into the bank, and—Esperanza recounted—what do you think he did? He vanished to Costa Rica, leaving us with the debt! Before long, debt collectors working for the microcredit agency turned up, and

after they had been delayed a few times they began to threaten to summon the police. With no option but to pay the loan however they could, Esperanza and Erwin were forced to sell a *manzana* of land, part of Esperanza's *derecho* within the cooperative.⁸² And Wilber, she told, stayed off in Costa Rica working on a salad farm for the next few years. More or less everything he earned while he was there he drank, she lamented; the family saw not one *cordoba* of it.

The ultimate cause of the whole affair was clear to Esperanza. Wilber's weakness in the face of the temptations of *los vicios*; the overwhelming desire—for her an unambiguous manifestation of diabolic agency—to drink money away rather than direct it sensibly to productive, long-term ends. This weakness, then, left her vulnerable to the vagaries of her son's capacity to resist the temptations placed in his path by the devil; a capacity frequently compromised.

Everyday cultivation of household contributions

A full account of Esperanza's depiction of her son's behaviour, I suggest, requires an appreciation of the way in which, from her perspective, the emergence of the household depends upon different modes of recruitment of male capacity. I turn now to an exploration of her everyday methods of attempting to secure these needed incorporations, in particular through her judicious deployment of gifts and the sharing of food.

Esperanza was continually making efforts to make building alterations to her property; to construct, alter or improve the existing adobe structures and surrounding yard.⁸³ The crucial factor in being able to realise such ambitions was the

⁸² She had been a member of the group who had negotiated to take possession of a separated *derecho* in *El Zapote*, as discussed in the previous chapter.

⁸³ 'House' and 'household' are of course distinct concepts, but anthropologists have long argued that analysing local engagements with the physical and material elements of the former is crucial to understand the latter (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995).

capacity to secure male contributions of labour and assistance, either through directing her husband or son towards these tasks, or by recruiting neighbours with whom she had established ties of friendship and interdependence. Money was a crucial factor in such transactions, but money alone was hardly sufficient, given that Esperanza was only able to offer payments that were rather low even by local standards. Transactions were frequently undertaken using beans, maize or coffee (generally calculating their worth in relation to their going market value), or by giving chickens as payment, and often previously-purchased material goods such as plastic bowls would be traded in at the value of the price originally paid for them. Traces of such material transactions were continually present in Esperanza's description of the physical surroundings of the house; she recounted the transmuted form of this 'harvest' (*cosecha*) of chickens or that now-sold cooking pot in the blocks of adobe, sheets of zinc or bags of concrete she had exchanged for them. Indeed, any available surpluses would quickly be turned towards such ends. As mentioned in Chapter 2, my wife and I became a part of Esperanza's household during the period of research, and I frequently purchased cooking oil as part of my contribution to Esperanza in exchange for being fed. It soon became clear that purchasing in bulk to take advantage of the lower price meant that most of the larger bottle would be swiftly given away, often in payment for money already owed for past labour contributions.

Esperanza maintained a particularly consistent and ongoing relationship with Roger, a friend of her son who frequently passed time in the house. Indeed, she seemed to rely much more on the everyday contributions of Roger than she did on those of her son. Usually her son would refuse her requests that he undertake work on the latest building project, preferring either to devote his time to working in the fields—often working *a media* with other young men in the village—looking after his two horses, or relaxing with friends. Roger himself would sometimes be occupied working on portions of his father's *derecho*, which had either been assigned to him or

which he worked in conjunction with his father, and so he was not always available. If other work was available, the earnings would be considerably greater than what he might earn through undertaking odd jobs for Esperanza. But very frequently, Esperanza succeeded in persuading him to assist her with her projects, and he performed many of the heavier odd jobs and minor construction tasks that were continually required.

In the face of the potential unreliability of these everyday labour relations and exchanges which contributed towards the households' development, Esperanza assiduously cultivated her ties to Roger and a few other key individuals who were also willing to undertake these minor tasks. If Roger visited, he would always be provided with food (even at times when economic difficulties meant that such generosity couldn't sensibly be extended to all who stopped by), and these gifts of food were clearly and explicitly intended by Esperanza to maintain the relations of aid and assistance she had established with him. Gifts of food were by no means always so strategic. When I first arrived in the village, after a quite good coffee harvest when prices were relatively high, all guests would be given beans and a tortilla in defiantly unstingy displays of hospitality. But the following year, as discussed in Chapter 2, coffee prices had dropped and production had plummeted due to the ravages of 'coffee rust' disease (*la roya*), a crisis which coincided with a poor harvest of beans. Many families in the village were running short of food, and Esperanza's supplies were only maintained with the aid of a daughter's occasional remittances from Costa Rica. Nevertheless, her network of assistants continued to receive food whenever they passed, despite almost everyone else being denied such hospitality if decency could allow.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ That the strategic element of such gifts was in part explicitly entertained was made clear by the way Esperanza advised me about a prospective house rental back home. At one point towards the end of my fieldwork, my wife, back in the UK already, was arranging a rental tenancy in a new house. I had pointed out to Esperanza that it was possible we would stay in the house for just one year, since quite

What is clear is that the labour contributions required to pursue household-oriented projects could hardly be considered by Esperanza to be secure. If we refer by efficacy to the capacity to realise one's projects within the world, it is clear that the mode of efficacy enacted by Esperanza here was a dispersed one, one which required the coordination and containment of productive capacities originating outside herself. From Esperanza's point of view the possibility of productive realisation within the household depended upon the proper orientation of the specifically male



Figure 19—A Gualiqueme woman takes a break from kitchen duties.

capacities of both kin and neighbours. And yet the occasional unreliability introduced by the quotidian dependencies discussed above—the prospect that Roger might have another job for the day and so be unwilling to help, or the possibility that

frequently tenants are required to move out if a landlord, for example, chooses to sell the house. Eager that we should not be so passive and resigned in the face of such possibilities, Esperanza encouraged me to pay a visit to my new landlady as soon as I returned, and to take her little gifts (*regalitos*). You've got to know how to deal with people, as she stated on another occasion, you've got to know how to win them over (*como ganar a la gente*).

Wilber might prefer to tend to his horses rather than assist with her ambitions for the house—by no means fully describes the extent to which she experienced this need to contain male agency as unstable. Indeed, it would be fair to say that Esperanza⁸⁵—through her use of the notion of *vicio*—worked to construct this vitally necessary male potential as radically fallible, dangerously susceptible to chronic misdirection, and to be positively dangerous to the same degree that it was necessary. The dispersed mode of efficacy just described was made problematic, then, by the extent to which the necessary containment of separate potentials was resisted by the posited nature of male capacity.

Working ‘a media’

It is certainly the case that factors of household structure may be adduced to account for the tensions perceived by Esperanza. There was, no doubt, a crucial generational factor to the instability of Wilber’s contributions, having to do with the particular stage of the ‘domestic cycle’ (cf. Chayanov et al., 1986; Durrenberger, 1984) that Esperanza’s household occupied at the time of research, and which played a part in the particular problems of containing and incorporating male potential faced in her case. Wilber was twenty-five years old, and plenty of married men his age in the village had been allocated parcels of land in order to establish independent households. But until a man is married, his parents generally refrain from fully ceding land, instead recruiting him to work together with his father, or perhaps allowing him to work parcels independently but without ceding ownership. And though parents will if possible provide children a minimal inheritance in land upon marriage—enough in theory to establish a separate household—they will generally

⁸⁵ I focus here specifically on her own accounts, but I take her depictions to be characteristic and to capture something crucial and with general relevance.

try and retain the majority of their holdings for division upon their deaths. In Nicaragua and other Latin American countries, this practice is captured in the popular saying, ‘the pig doesn’t let go of its fat until it dies’ (*el chancho no suelta la manteca hasta que se muere*) (cf. Mendoza Vidaurre, 2013). Ethnographic accounts have long reported similar attitudes in different parts of rural Latin America, and in many cases informants explicitly understand these strategies to be part of an effort to ensure the continued support and loyalty of adult children, who are understood to be liable to leave their parents to fend for themselves unless there is the incentive of an inheritance to encourage them (Foster, 1979, p64; Gudeman, 1976, pp111-3; Lewis, 1964, p497).

The everyday strategies employed by young unmarried men to secure a measure of financial independence from their parents, despite depending on access to land through their parents’ *derecho* in the cooperative, are of crucial relevance here. The resulting tensions of generation and intra-household authority undoubtedly contributed to Esperanza’s perception of the household as rendered precarious by the need for male contributions. The most frequently deployed among such strategies was the arrangement of working ‘*a media*’, sharecropping with a half and half divide of the harvest. From the perspective of young men, working *a media* was often explicitly conceived of as a way to free the products of one’s own labour from parental authority, to free it from being immersed in the complementarities and mutual incorporations of domesticity. Wilber and Roger (also unmarried) each spoke about this frankly and openly. When they work with their fathers, they both told me, it was ultimately their fathers’ decisions how the produce was directed, and the tendency would generally be towards the needs of the household. Whichever way produce was directed, they would have little personal say, though they might be allowed some small portion of the total produce to sell and spend on their own things. But by establishing labour partnerships with other young men from the

village, they both stated, harvests were freed from the controlling influence of parents.

Your parents had no claim on harvests undertaken through these ‘half and half’ (*a media*) sharecropping arrangements. Although the work might be undertaken on land that was part of one parents’ *derecho*, the harvest was considered in such instances to be the exclusive property of those who had worked it. Wilber and Roger stated that in such partnerships, you could perfectly legitimately sell the



Figure 20—‘Burning’ (*quemando*) in order to prepare land for planting as part of an ‘*a media*’ sharecropping agreement.

whole harvest in order to buy a few clothes, get things you need, instead of having to turn the harvest over to your father as you would if you worked together with him. Neither of them described themselves as depriving their households of needed contributions through such strategies, but rather appeared to perceive the method as freeing themselves from bothersome and intrusive paternal authority, establishing the possibility of independent disposal of the products of their labour. Esperanza too viewed Wilber’s decisions in a comparable light. He never wants to work his parcels

with family members, she complained, because he knows that then he wouldn't be able to just sell the harvest straight away. That's why he's always working *a media* with people from outside (*gente de afuera*); referring to individuals from neighbouring villages. By casting these kinds of integral and intractable household tensions as a matter of *vicio*, however—as a matter of a failure to adequately control and discipline the inherent volatility of masculinity—Esperanza rendered them amenable to a stabilising solution. The antidote for *vicio*, of course, is more Evangelical discipline and devotion.

Parties, drinking, violence

By drawing on notions of *vicio*, then, Esperanza's emphasis turned overwhelmingly upon a broad depiction of volatile masculinity. We have seen how, for her, the properly realised household depended upon the appropriate direction of male capacity. But that male capacity, articulated in relation to notions of *vicio*, is cast as radically vulnerable to misdirection, and susceptible to destructive excess—manifesting as drunkenness and violence. Esperanza's discussions about parties and the prospect of men drinking together, and her response to the possibility of drunkenness on Sundays when many men did indeed gather to drink, stand as further examples of this.

Esperanza spoke explicitly about drinking in relation to the prospect of her son having parties. Indeed, her anxiety about the chaotic possibilities that might emerge from her son holding a party paralleled her emphasis on the unreliability of his material contributions to the household. What happens in parties, she stated simply and clearly, was that the men drink, everyone's having fun and soon enough they set to arguing (*se ponen a discutir*), and they argue, argue, and before you know it someone has pulled out a knife and there you have it (*allí va*). The only way of avoiding such dangers, it was clear to her, was the prospect of committed religiosity, which was capable of saving men from this violent excess through a complete

existential transformation. As she put it, ‘the Christian is a Christian, and the drunk is a drunk’ (*él que es cristiano es cristiano, y él que es bolo es bolo*). This association of drunkenness with inevitable violence accounts for the way in which she reacted to the presence of men drinking on Sundays, when the weekly baseball game would often see groups gathering with a few bottles of cheap *aguardiente*. If Esperanza thought ‘drunks’ (*bolos*) were anywhere near the house, she would react with extreme caution, often rushing to turn off the lights and insisting that anyone else present remain silent.

From the point of view of Esperanza and the concerns of the household, it has been seen, efficacy depends upon displaced and separate potentials. The capacity to act depends upon the possibility of recruiting the capabilities and potentials of others. Amid these stipulations, the concept of *vicio* works to emphasise the extent to which these requirements bring with them vulnerabilities and forms of precariousness; by constructing male agency as radically vulnerable to being undermined by the temptations of sin, while being integral to the household, the prospect of secure domestic productivity comes to hang on the possibility of guarding against these temptations. And it is here that the dependency at the heart of sociality becomes problematic, since the form of distributed efficacy Esperanza inhabits is fundamentally threatened by this perennial ethical weakness. But reference to *vicio* also offers Evangelical practice as a solution to these problems. By coming to depict these problems as constituting *vicio*, Esperanza makes them amenable to influence by Evangelical Christianity’s prescriptions for proper comportment and visions of the possibilities of prayer. By working to achieve as close an identification as possible with the divine powers attributed to the bible and to the Holy Spirit, the prospect of overcoming the insecurities integral to domestic productivity becomes a feasible one. In Esperanza’s case, however, this compelling envisioned solution to the problematic requirements of domesticity remained somewhat elusive, as her son—the principal target of her use of the notion of *vicio*—

remained a Catholic. As will be seen, Mauricio's account—to which I now turn—works to construct a comparable sense of domestic vulnerability amid complementarity and co-dependency, in relation to the excessive qualities attributed to female potential.

Mauricio

Mauricio Carrasco held the position of 'leader' in the Gualiqueme congregation of the Church of God of the Prophecy (*Iglesia de Dios de la Profecía: la Profecía* hereafter) throughout the time of research. He attended evening celebrations most days of the week, and committed much of his free time to assisting the different pastors⁸⁶ with church activities. He spoke about his ambitions to some day becoming a pastor himself, and move to another community to preach.

The way he recounted his former life of *vicio* prior to conversion contains similar laments about the wastefulness and economically-irresponsible nature of 'sinful' behaviour as we witnessed in Esperanza's narrative. It is worth noting that the context for my hearing Mauricio's account was a religiously mixed one, emphasising the extent to which the theme of vice is not one that is restricted to Evangelical audiences, but rather constitutes a shared point of reference.⁸⁷ I was accompanying a group of cooperative members on a fire patrol. These patrols are organised each year to guard against the possibility of forest fire.⁸⁸ After casually strolling around the perimeter of the pine forest, the group made its way towards a good vantage point, and most of the day was spent on a hill overlooking one area of the forest, fending off boredom with stories and banter until the sun's heat died down. At one point,

⁸⁶ Pastors in this group tended to serve for a period of 2 years in each community prior to being assigned a different congregation by their seniors in the group's institutional hierarchy.

⁸⁷ To be sure, proselytising efforts are at play in such exchanges; but the ethical and theological interest in conversations of this kind is generally not one-sided.

⁸⁸ A serious fire did in fact damage a large swathe of the cooperative's pine plantation on one occasion.

Mauricio turned to talking about his experiences as a migrant labourer in El Salvador.

He spoke about how he had been able to secure a well-paying position working as a night watchman, guarding heavy machinery in a factory compound. The work had been easy, he said; he just had to sit there all night and was paid 300 dollars a month, and was soon accumulating substantial savings. Over the course of his time working there, he became involved with a girl, fourteen or fifteen years old. He would meet her after school, before he had to turn up to his night shift, and eventually things progressed to the point where he met her parents and became quite friendly with them. When the girl's mother found out that there was a romantic side to their friendship, she gave Mauricio a friendly warning that her husband would not take the matter so lightly. If he realised that the relationship had gone beyond visiting without his formal permission being granted, there could be trouble.

Mauricio's stay in El Salvador was interrupted, however, by his own mother suffering a stroke, which compelled him to rush back to Nicaragua.⁸⁹ When he was back at home, though, his mind remained on the girl, and once his mother had recovered he returned to El Salvador with a plan to 'rob' (*robar*) her and bring her back to Gualiqueme with him.⁹⁰ He had a plan all figured out, he explained; which bus routes they could take in order to get back to Nicaragua without being caught by the girl's father. But upon returning, he found out that his former girlfriend (*novia*) had already been 'robbed' by someone else. Disheartened, he stayed only a few weeks more before returning home. Once back, he said, it was very little time before he had

⁸⁹ Incidentally, it was his mother's apparently divine cure after a series of Evangelical prayer sessions that persuaded both Mauricio and his brother—now two of the most committed church members in Gualiqueme—to originally convert.

⁹⁰ This is the standard way of referring to the practice of eloping, and is by far the most common way in which conjugal relationships are initially established in rural Central America. Note that 'robbing' is a consensual arrangement between the eloping partners, and contrasts with courtships which take place with the knowledge and blessing of—usually in the presence of—the girl's father. Cf. Foster (1979, pp67-74) for a classic discussion.

blown his substantial savings on '*vicios*'. On the one hand, there were the temptations of bars and alcohol. On the other, the temptations of 'womanising' (*mujereando*). His account presented alcohol and women as having closely comparable effects; the wasteful frittering away of money. Ramon Bautista chipped in at this point and the two began a long discussion of a few particularly dangerous seductresses resident in the village, women whose lust for men and money, both insisted, had caused them no end of financial loss over the years.

In each of these cases, the theme of *vicio* serves to give voice to vulnerabilities that are intimately related to structural economic precariousness. The sudden incursion of debt which culminated with Wilber running away from his responsibilities has to do with the consequences of market instability for producers living financially on the brink. And the ease with which hard-earned savings in Mauricio's account could be lost to a minor spree of hedonism further indicates this structural precariousness. In both cases, migration plays a crucial role, and Nicaragua's regional position in relation to international flows of labour must be taken into account. As the poorest Latin American nation after Haiti, Nicaragua's rural population increasingly turn to migration to Costa Rica, El Salvador, or (more commonly among residents of the field site due to ease of access) Honduras to seek employment.

Mauricio's ineligibility as an appropriate suitor in all probability had to do with his former girlfriend's family's perceptions of him as an economically unviable husband. Filling the ranks of lowest-paid jobs in each of the receiving countries, migrating Nicaraguans are widely reported to be attributed low status by their host communities, often suffering considerable discrimination (cf. Marquette, 2006; Sandoval García, 2004a; Sandoval García, 2004b). Casting vulnerabilities and weaknesses that have to do with this broad structural context as *vicio*, as a moral fault that can be overcome, as something which Evangelical ritual and spiritual discipline has the potential to master, can in part be viewed, it might be suggested, as an effort

to gain a measure of control over this otherwise apparently unforgiving economic context.

But while some kind of response to or engagement with broad structural factors is no doubt part of what is going on and must be acknowledged, such an analysis would remain incomplete, as it would fail to account for the specific texture of instability which *vicio* putatively offers a resolution for. It has already been seen that Esperanza's effort to stabilise the possibility of domestic productivity centred on volatilities posited as inhering in masculine potentials. Precariousness for her emerged out of the incorporations posited as required for the household to be sustained, and stood as a function of the properties of the gendered elements involved in that incorporation. Discourses of *vicio* rendered domestic efficacy a plausible outcome of religious observance by framing these precarities as liable to be overcome through the identification of selves with divine will. Mauricio's dilemma, I suggest, is best viewed as working from a complementary set of assumptions about female potentials, and it is to these ideas that I now turn.

Women's excessive potential

Just as Esperanza's reference to *vicio* has to do with the demand that male potential be contained in order for proper domesticity to emerge, and the simultaneous construction of that potential as both crucial and dangerous, susceptible to radical disorientation and dangerous excess, so Mauricio's account above can be seen to be concerned with comparable and complementary depictions of female productivity and potential. The scenario he recounts—where the failure to properly establish a new household with a potential wife leads to an extravagant loss of accumulated earnings—is significant. The wastefulness of sinful living—giving in to the expensive temptations of booze and women—is presented as opposed to the envisaged possibility of domesticity that, back then at least, he didn't manage to realise. And the opposition in his account of this prospect of secure domesticity to a dissipation of

resources caused by wildly uncontained female sexuality points to the fact that proper domesticity is understood to require the complementary containment of a female potential construed as comparably volatile. Just as ideals of domesticity construe masculinity as requiring containment but as being susceptible to dangerous excess—there related to oppositions between the positive valence of work and food, as opposed to the excess of alcohol and violence—so the generative possibility of female production is viewed as susceptible to dangerous escape. To illustrate this point, I will set Mauricio's account in relation to everyday constructions of femininity operative in the village.

The proper emergence of domesticity depends upon the containment of a female potential that if appropriately oriented manifests as life-giving nurturance, and if excessive and unbounded is understood to be realised as a dangerous sexuality (cf. Montoya, 2002). It is through judgements of the latter, negatively valued and transgressive sexuality that ideals coalesce and are continually constructed. Everyday judgement of women's comportment in the village is strongly oriented towards appropriate physical containment in the domestic space, and moments when women stray beyond the confines of the household constitute key points of anxiety. Unnecessary journeys are sometimes explicitly condemned, and women's visits are often required to exhibit some practical component to constitute them as necessary and unavoidable in order to avert the dubious implications apparent aimlessness brings. The dangers of these necessary journeys should be met with strict standards of modesty. A woman should walk swiftly to her intended destination, ideally without interacting with men along the way. Such concerns, of course, reflect the pervasive conceptual opposition between 'house' and 'street' analysed in the Nicaraguan case by Montoya (2003), which appears to be a key idiom through which gender is framed across Latin America (cf. Da Matta, 1985).

The judgements elicited by one young woman's behaviour in the village frequently brought these ethical standards to the surface during the period of

fieldwork. Rosario, recently married at the age of 13, regularly walked the length of the village between the house of her mother, and the house being newly constructed by her husband. Both of them were members of *La Profecía* Pentecostal church. Talkative, boisterous and sharply intelligent, Rosario frequently engaged in banter with neighbours while undertaking the journey, sometimes verbally sparring with groups of young men who called out to her as she passed. Such behaviour, however, was sufficient to arouse the extreme suspicion of her husband's family, who took to closely observing her when she passed, keenly looking out for evidence of infidelity. Neighbours gossiped about her aggressively, examining her closely as she passed in the street.

Indeed, suspicions about a woman's proper restraint and containment of her sexuality frequently centred upon such observations of her talking to unrelated men in public. A woman seen to so behave was assumed to be flagrantly inviting the sexual advances of those men. Extreme jealousy, and sometimes violent reprimand, was often the reaction of husbands whose wives were willing to visibly engage other men in conversation. Several cases of spousal conflict that were ongoing during the course of my research revolved around incidents of observed public conversation, with this evident social openness assumed to indicate a hidden sexual openness. Violent jealousy springs from this logic, and the idea that beating is required to repress these excessive potentials fuels domestic violence (Foster, 1979). There is, of course, no condemnation of men who initiate or pursue such conversations, who are assumed to be responding to temptation and provocation in a way that is natural and understandable (cf. Montoya, 2002).

In one instance, a violently jealous husband, Bayardo, would become extremely angry whenever his wife Maritza (in fact the daughter of Esperanza) left the house unaccompanied. Esperanza traced this jealousy in part to an incident in the past when Maritza had behaved inappropriately, as she saw it, with some visiting labourers. Several years previously, a municipal works project had been active in the

area, constructing a new road through the village, which involved a number of itinerant workers taking up temporary residence while the construction was completed. Those men in most cases needed to find someone to perform domestic duties for them. As is standard across rural Central America, men away from home will generally strive to avoid the necessity of performing domestic duties for themselves. Although some Gualiqueme men who had experienced migrant labour in Costa Rica told of times when they had been compelled by circumstance to prepare their own food and wash their own clothes, these tales gained their performative impact precisely to the extent that they served to construct the experience of migrant labour as a heroic venture into extreme circumstances, an adventure where proper standards are necessarily forsaken. Indeed, the same informants would frequently point out that some of their colleagues in Costa Rican vegetable farms, or Honduran coffee plantations, had ensured that they were accompanied by female relatives—sometimes wives, but often sisters or cousins—in order to avoid such domestic independence (cf. Sick, 1998). A young man will generally not leave home until he finds a wife to perform domestic duties for him, and if a man's wife is absent for some reason, he will have to rely upon female kin to provide for his food, washing and cleaning needs.

So when the road was being built, some of the visiting labourers offered Maritza modest payments in order to wash their clothes for them, since they had no access to female relatives. Keen to take advantage of the additional income, Maritza accepted the work. Both her mother and her husband, however, were deeply troubled by the implications of this extension and commercialisation of her domestic duties and exchanges. As a young woman, performing such tasks for men other than her husband was read as having highly sexualised implications; and the violent jealousy of her husband, and the unsympathetic condemnation of her mother, soon followed. With this and other experiences putting him on guard, Bayardo kept a close and suspicious watch on Maritza's movements. During the time of research, Maritza

established a mobile phone top-up business—taking advantage of the novel possibility of getting phone signal within the village after the construction of a new communications mast—which required occasional trips to town to put additional credit on her vendor’s account. After one such visit, she and her mother encouraged me to agree to participate in a cover story that I had accompanied her on the trip. Travelling alone, it was clear, could only imply disloyal motives, and I appeared to be considered sufficiently part of the family by that point to comprise a suitable chaperone. On another occasion Maritza agreed to deliver a chicken on behalf of her mother to a friend of the family. But again, both mother and daughter agreed that there was no prospect of being open with Bayardo about the journey: they concocted the pretext that she was in fact visiting a sister with a young baby who needed help washing sheets. The visit being to a family member, and indeed being for the explicit purpose of engaging in respectable domestic duties, appeared to them to be capable of assuaging the husband’s suspicions.

At one point during my fieldwork, Maritza’s mother was attempting to sell a chicken in order to raise a little cash. When I enquired as to why she needed the money, she explained to me that Bayardo, furiously jealous after another incident, was refusing to work on his wife’s land, instead going off to get drunk with friends in a neighbouring village. The couple’s primary source of income was a small area of coffee that had been acquired through Maritza’s mother’s *derecho* in the cooperative. Coffee trees needed to be planted, and so Maritza needed to raise some money to be able to pay casual labourers (*mozos*), her mother explained. Bayardo had married into the area, and the couple understood the land to belong to Maritza. That Bayardo enacted his anger through refusing to work on his wife’s land and instead getting drunk appears to be an entirely characteristic response to a problem perceived as being based on deficiencies in the complementary containments and mutual incorporations of domesticity. Furious that his wife’s sexuality appeared to him to be escaping the bounds of the household, he specifically refused to expend his own

fuera in contributing towards the family income, indulging in destructive drinking; a rebellion which can be best viewed as comprising a symmetrical transgression as to that he understood his wife to be committing.

It can also be observed that a woman's capacity to control herself is viewed as dependent upon her proper conjugal relation to a man, a prerequisite that becomes evident in popular evaluations of women who do not meet it. Single women living independently in the village rarely escaped the assumed judgement that they made a living from prostitution, and were the frequent targets of humorous gossip centred upon this theme. Such assumptions tended not to be framed in terms of an economic necessity which compelled a turn to prostitution in order to meet financial needs; but rather to revolve around the sense that a single woman's necessarily unconstrained sexuality would naturally find outlet in such practices. Everyday banter among both men and women found great cause for amusement in such speculation. However, though a relationship with a man is apparently required for the domestication of female sexuality, the ethical imperative for the proper conversion of this potential into an appropriate capacity to nurture and feed is understood to fall primarily upon the woman.

As was evident in Mauricio's account above, men frequently speak about women's sexuality as being an almost aggressive force against which one must be careful not to fall victim. Indeed, those women whose sexual potential is understood to be uncontained—to be untethered from the domesticating restraints of conjugal relations—are often constructed as dangerous temptresses whose aggressively seductive advances need to be resisted. Tales of sexual conquest among men often cast responsibility for transgressive relations upon such dangerously seductive women, and frequently take the form of a lament about money 'lost' in such

encounters.⁹¹ This association of extra-marital affairs with the flow of financial assistance from men to women is so strong that discussion of such relations is often hard to clearly distinguish from accounts of prostitution. When men are described as womanising (*mujereando*), the evaluative component of such a label is generally centred on the fact that such activities are expensive, rather than connoting emotional betrayal. Indeed, the solid definitional and evaluative boundary separating prostitution from ‘normal’ sexual relations in Euro-American popular conceptions—a distinction founded on assumptions about the incompatibility of money and love or romance—can almost be said not to hold in rural Nicaragua (cf. Hagene, 2010). The man who messes around dissipates resources that should properly be directed towards the household. His activities are condemned to the extent that they fail to contribute towards the conversion of labour power into the maintenance of his household. That a man should be naturally oriented towards the ‘conquest’ of women, and that the conjugal bond has little power to restrain such putatively natural orientations, is taken for granted.

Such attitudes are also in accordance with the way in which responsibility is assigned in situations of adultery. It is overwhelmingly understood to be the woman who is culpable in a situation where extra-marital relations lead to conflict or separation. The judgement appears to be that a woman should properly keep her sexuality restrained; that it is primarily her responsibility to keep herself appropriately separated from men whose desires she might arouse. For example, in one incident that occurred during my fieldwork, a woman left her husband—both of whom were members of a local Evangelical church—and moved in with a lover in another village (also an Evangelical from a different group). Commentary after the

⁹¹ This observation comprises an interesting counterpoint to Lancaster's (1992) influential account of male sexuality in the barrios of Managua. Lancaster's informants, he argues, tended to conceptualise sexuality primarily in terms of an active / passive opposition, with the effort to occupy the active role central to the performances which constitute *machismo*. Here, to the contrary, men—Catholics and Evangelicals—were keen to cast themselves as the hapless victims of an overwhelming and engulfing female sexuality.

event centred overwhelmingly on the woman as being primarily responsible for the separation. Some suggested that she had gone ‘mad’, others pointed out that she had done the same thing before, implying that it was simply part of her uncontrollably promiscuous nature. Mauricio himself told a neighbour how he had explicitly advised the cuckolded husband, in his capacity as a ‘leader’ of his Church, not to direct his anger towards his wife’s lover. A man cannot be blamed for responding to a woman’s advances, Mauricio counselled, warning that irrationally placing the blame upon the man could lead to unnecessary violence. He advised his fellow congregant to recognise that the blame lay entirely with his former wife.

For Mauricio, then, his own successful establishment of a viable household in the years since the events he recounted above had been contingent upon the restraining and domestication of both the excessive potentials he attributed to femininity, and to his own restraint of a volatile masculinity. Through use of the notion of *vicio* to describe these excessive traits and potentials, Mauricio rendered those stabilising restraints something able to be achieved through the disciplines of Evangelical practice. With both men and women required to work upon themselves such that an intimate embodiment of divine will could be obtained, in prayer and in daily life, Pentecostalism’s rigorous prescriptions of comportment, dress, and manners offered Mauricio and other Evangelicals a viable solution to the longstanding problem of how to overcome forms of precariousness inherent in domesticity.

Conclusion

While many accounts of Evangelical ethical concerns tend to frame them as technologies of the self (drawing on Foucault, 1988), forging emergent modes of individualised subjectivity closely harmonious with a neoliberal political economy, this chapter has indicated the extent to which such discourses rather find their purchase by serving as a potent ‘technology of the household’. We have seen that

notions of *vicio* gain their force in relation to constructions of secure domesticity posited as contingent upon the containment of gendered potentials. There is, to an extent, a certain gendered symmetry in the ways in which complementary, volatile potencies need to be bound into the processual emergence of household relations.⁹² For men, this requires directing their capacity towards the household via the struggle of labour, and away from destructive excess to which it is always prone. For women, the injunction is to comparably contain their genitive, creative and productive potential towards household reproduction and restrain excess—with sexual openness cast as the ultimate dissipation of this prescribed containment. Within this set of assumptions, the inverse of appropriate labour is extravagantly wasteful drunkenness and violence (cf., Gudeman, 1976, p81), and the inverse of appropriate housekeeping is an assumed sexual openness indistinguishable from prostitution. Ideas about *vicio*, we have seen, isolate and emphasise the excessive quality of those potentials and their occasional capacity for destructive inversion, but simultaneously open up the prospect that Evangelical prescriptions for daily practice can work to secure the forms of stabilised mutual containment that domesticity demands. In other words, discourses of *vicio* stress the possibility that precariousness and vulnerability emerge out of the prospect of such potentials becoming uncontained, and allow the risk of that potential uncontainment to be theoretically eliminated through religious discipline and commitment, with close identification with the will of divinity working to secure gendered volatilities.

The argument pursued in this chapter has been that Evangelical discourses of *vicio* serve to offer a novel mode of revolving a longstanding problematic of domestic efficacy. The stipulation that domesticity and the prospect of productivity within the household depends upon complementary incorporations across lines of gender is,

⁹² Cf. Mayblin (2010), who comparably argues that the overarching structure of ethical priorities among Northeastern peasants in Brazil are shared by men and women, while emphasis of gender difference occupies much of the literature on gender.

clearly, by no means a specifically Evangelical concern. What is novel in Evangelical framings is the assertion that this longstanding problematic can potentially be resolved through religious disciplines understood to *overcome* the precarities emergent from these assumptions, through identification with divine will. The volatilities of gender are taken to be obviated by working, through daily religious practice, to bind both male and female selves into an identification with divinity.

Such a perspective is of significance in relation to a number of key debates which raise the issue of how best to deploy the notion of precariousness in our analyses. Many studies of rural Latin Americans take precariousness and vulnerability as an analytic starting point, situating that precariousness in objective economic marginality and the condition of poverty. Local ideas and practices are consequently cast as *responses* to that unequivocal structural precariousness, survival strategies compelled by circumstance (cf., e.g., Nygren and Myatt-Hirvonen, 2009). While poverty obviously cannot be overlooked in any evaluation of rural Nicaraguan life, the material presented in this chapter makes clear the need to attend to the ways in which local evaluations of precariousness emerge amid a range of local ideas about proper relations and the requirements of productive sociality. It has been clear throughout the discussion that such constructions are intimately related to material conditions, but exchanges and material flows understood to secure viable domesticity are bound up with local perceptions of security. This insight relates to the perspective developed in the previous chapter, where it was seen that understanding local efforts to achieve security in the context of land access requires comprehending the way involvements with land attempt to resolve a key dilemma of efficacy, such that contained and distant potentials and sources of power can be tentatively woven together. The tentative, tenuous, weaving together of domestic units, it has been seen, though playing out on a different scale, involves comparable efforts to bind down and secure sources of potency perceived as distant; though here that distance emerges from the categorical separations of gender.

Consequently, the perspective developed here speaks to theoretical debates about the role, status and dynamics of the peasant household, and the place of that unit within wider social relations. As was mentioned in the introduction, accounts have frequently depicted prevailing attitudes of ‘suspicion’ as working to inhibit the creation of collectivisms and solidarities understood as relations or ties *between* households (Foster, 1979; Gudeman, 1976). But the material presented here complicates such formulations; local perceptions of instability by no means revolve primarily around the problem of connections *between* households understood as discrete, interacting units. Rather, lines of cleavage are contained just as much *within* the household itself, and negotiating and mediating that distance is precisely what is required for productivity. We will return to this theme in Chapter 7, where the ways in which notions of ‘envy’ (*envidia*) play into assistentialist politics will be explored.

Chapter 6—Being organised, *gestionando* and leadership: local negotiations of assistentialism

The previous chapter argued that the potent resonance of widespread ideas about the dangers of *vicio* can best be understood in terms of vulnerable interdependence within households. Productive domestic relations are, it was suggested, viewed as requiring the cultivation of key dependencies upon tenuously-controllable nearby actors, and in consequence the smooth flow of interpersonal support is viewed as critically vulnerable to interruption by malign human potentials, potentials which might undermine the stability or reliability of supportive actors. In the face of such vulnerabilities, the prospects of a stabilising identification with divinity offered by Evangelical discourse and practice provides a potent and appealing solution; the elusive possibility of eliding the precarities emerging out of these necessary dependencies.

This chapter and the following one will examine the ways in which comparable understandings of the dilemmas inherent in efficacy inform and inflect local involvements with the political and institutional context prevailing in contemporary Nicaragua, serving as a way of grappling with and mapping the terrain of distributive and assistentialist politics (Ferguson, 2013b). This contemporary context, as discussed in Chapter 1, is marked by the continuing predominance of NGOs as a key institutional form in the countryside (Fisher, 2012; Kaimowitz, 1993; Neumann, 2013). Rural involvement with NGOs primarily takes the form of participation in ‘projects’ designed with a broad range of goals, often with the intention of making particular interventions in the subjectivity of beneficiaries; aiming to instil attitudes and values taken to be conducive to economic prosperity, framed by broad conceptions of development (Müller, 2010; Saldaña-Portillo, 2003). Material incentives to participation in projects tend to be framed by their designers as secondary, and downplayed in explicit efforts among development practitioners to

deter 'dependency' (Ferguson, 2013a; Fisher, 2012). The point of such projects for their architects is primarily educational, has to do with 'empowerment', and frequently aims to foster or tap into organisational capacities attributed to rural 'communities'; being 'organised' (*organizado*), consequently, is often a prerequisite for participation in projects. Distributive and financial elements of program designs are often assumed to be a crucial component given the poverty of beneficiaries, but are generally taken to primarily facilitate and enable the main endeavour of subjective and organisational empowerment.

Alongside the activities of these organisations, the form state intervention in the countryside has taken since Ortega's return to the presidency in 2007 has been marked by a tremendous emphasis upon forms of social assistance with a comparable interplay between educational intervention, organisational stipulations, aspirations to rework rural subjectivities, and generally including distributive components taken to enable the preceding goals. Projects such as *Hambre Cero* and *Programa Amor* have received much attention in recent commentaries, reflecting their prevalence in Sandinista policy and media discourse (Montoya, 2012a; Spalding, 2012). And as Deborah James (2011) observes to be the case in South Africa, recent state welfare interventions have in key ways tended to adopt the form and organisational style of NGO development projects.⁹³ The singular discursive emphasis upon these state programs in official channels of media communication have led commentators to characterise Ortega's current incumbency as comprising an 'assistentialist' political regime (Montoya, 2012a), with less sympathetic evaluations frequently articulated in relation to concepts of clientelism and populism. The general tenor of commentary has been critical, viewing the

⁹³ In the Nicaraguan case the career path of FSLN functionaries and administrators who found themselves out of work after the Sandinistas' electoral defeat in 1990 frequently led them towards NGO employment during the 1990s and early 2000s (Fisher, 2012). That the organisational form of state projects undertaken by the most recent Sandinista administration follows, to an extent, methods and styles prevailing among the development community should perhaps not, then, be a great surprise.

deployment of distributive projects as going hand in hand with a broad shift towards patrimonial, *caudillo*-style politics in the political centre (Babb, 2012; Close and Deonandan, 2004; Close and i Puig, 2009).

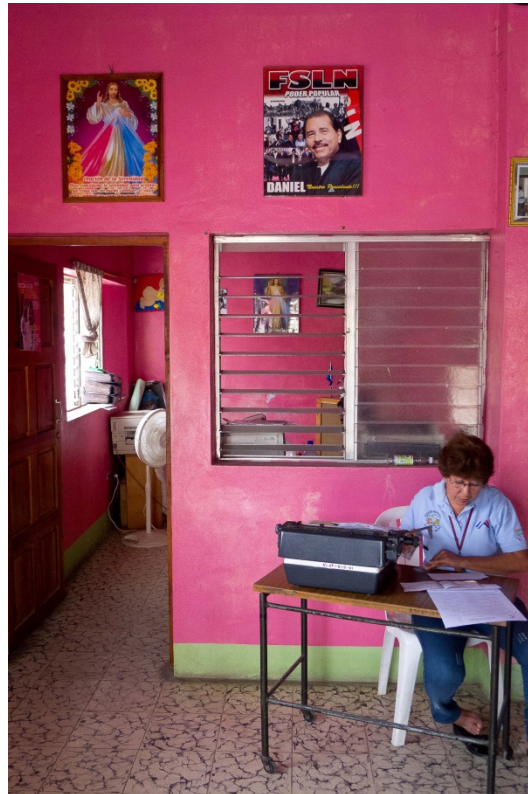


Figure 21—Personalist politics? An image of Ortega alongside religious posters in a local government office

In addition to NGO and state projects, cooperatives of different kinds remain a major institutional presence of relevance for rural people, often serving to channel the delivery of NGO welfare projects. Also relevant here is the continuing effort of Ortega's FSLN to instantiate forms of 'participatory democracy' or 'citizen power' (*poder ciudadano*) through the further development of community-led organisations such as the Gabinetes de la Familia, Salud y Vida, and the Comites de Agua. These popular organisations, particularly the Gabinetes de la Familia, are conceptualised in official discourse as organs through which *empowerment* of communities can be enabled, through the cultivation of horizontal solidarities and the instantiation of

direct lines of communication between 'the people' and the central organs of state power.

Amid this institutional context, then, 'being organised' as a political and ethical imperative has been cultivated as a key political principle by a range of actors, from Sandinista functionaries and politicians across the various phases of recent history, through NGO leaders hoping to tap into the benign qualities attributed to 'community' (Fisher, 2012). While at times this imperative has been taken to tap into longstanding communitarian social forms, some iterations of the priority have assumed organisation to be antithetical to traditional peasant culture, and thus require its revolutionary overhaul and reformation (Montoya, 2012b; Saldaña-Portillo, 2003). But this range of institutionally-embedded priorities has in each case centred on notions of empowerment gained through the realisation and enactment of collectivity. Existing ethnographic work has already drawn attention to some of the ways in which the 'horizontal' political values putatively cultivated by such injunctions to organise appear to sit at odds with rural priorities (Fisher, 2012; Michelutti, 2012; Montoya, 2012b). This and subsequent chapters aim to further our understanding of this failure to see eye to eye between project designers on the one hand, and rural participants in projects on the other. The account of efficacy developed in this thesis, it will be suggested, provides insight into the specific ways in which this prevailing imperative to be and live organised (*estar organizado* / *vivir organizado*) has been received and reworked by rural recipients and beneficiaries of state and NGO projects in the light of key local notions of productive sociality.

The chapter, then, will first explore the institutional context within which being organised has become manifest as a key political value, and investigate the varying iterations of this pivotal trope as it has been taken up by Gualiqueme residents, coming to suffuse everyday commentaries and political evaluations. It will be shown that while FSLN and NGO discourse tends to situate the value of being organised *immanently*, as enabling capacities inherent in the organised collectivity

itself, rural participants themselves overwhelming stress the point of participation as being the securing of assistance, gaining ‘help’ through which access to distant abundance might be gained (cf. Fisher, 2012, who makes comparable observations on the basis of fieldwork with a Nicaraguan NGO). This notion of a prosperity deriving primarily from distributive and external sources, however, sits uneasily with longstanding norms of value rooted in the struggle of agricultural labour. In the light of this tension, the chapter will proceed to investigate the ways in which the manifold prospects attributed to ‘being organised’ are construed as being contingent upon performing key acts of solicitation, termed ‘*gestiones*’; a conceptual move which reconciles visions of distributive abundance with the proposition that value is founded upon physical effort. It will be argued here that this concept of ‘*gestionando*’—broadly, the intensive activity of political solicitation—works to frame the received imperative to live organised in the light of crucial stipulations pertaining to productive living, which place high value on notions of support and assistance. Specifically, the possibility of performing *gestiones* is accorded a transformative potential rooted in physical exertion and effort, working to weave pervasive theories of value based on notions of *fuerza* (Gudeman, 2012; Gudeman and Rivera, 1990) and the capacity to struggle (Mayblin, 2010) into a framework of institutional solicitation. In this context the hope of transformative assistance shapes perceptions of political possibility, and local leaders are invested with the weight of this aspiration. The chapter, exploring the implications of these assumptions for local figures of leadership, consequently provides a novel perspective on the figure of the ‘broker’ in situations of distributive politics (cf., James, 2011; Nuijten, 2003). By investing local leaders with expectations and political hopes structured by this set of key ideas, it will be seen, Gualiqueme residents work to deploy norms of efficacy grounded in domesticity and subsistence agriculture in the encompassing sphere of organisational activity, development aid, and state welfare provision. The chapter will conclude with a case study of a particular scenario in which this understanding

of *gestionando* was deployed, revealing the pressures levelled against local leaders through the insistence that assistance is a product of embodied struggle.

We saw in Chapter 3 how narratives of village history situated key moments of transformative provision and assistance as being integral to the development of the community. It was argued there that the vital idea of assistance underpinned the sense of developmental progression structuring understandings of the past, amounting to a distinctive form of historicity in which ‘help’ (*ayuda*) holds a central place. Those historical understandings are, of course, closely bound up with the possibilities attributed to ‘being organised’ being examined here. Indeed, the close relationship between the community’s formation as a cooperative—which was understood by Sandinista functionaries and cooperative *socios* alike as a transition to the state of being organised (Müller, 2010; Saldaña-Portillo, 2003)—and the sense that a novel relationship of assistance had been established between rural constituencies and the revolutionary government in the 1980s (as argued in Chapter 3), stands as a paradigmatic instance of a set of core ideas about political possibility which is just as relevant in local dealings in the present as in depictions of the past. This chapter will further the analysis of this rural political imaginary in which forms of assistance play a central role, by exploring the way in which this emphasis upon ‘being organised’ plays into political understandings among Gualiqueme residents.

Being organised

‘Everything comes from organisation’ (*todo viene por medio de la orgniazación*). This phrase and close variations of it, which I heard recounted many time among villagers, was stated explicitly by an FSLN functionary in a ‘Committee of Sandinista Leadership’ (*comite de liderazgo Sandinista*) meeting held in a village adjacent to Gualiqueme. ‘Look’, he stated to the audience, ‘this government works organisationally, and everything comes through organisations,’ (*mira, este gobierno trabaja organizativo, y todo viene bajo la organizacion*). The representative of the

local Sandinista mayoralty (*alcaldia*) was explaining the incumbent government's intention that all key social projects should be administered by institutions of participatory democracy such as the *Gabinetes de la Familia, Salud y Vida*, or delivered via organs of collectivised citizenry such as cooperatives. It should be the people themselves—he made clear—who through local organisations were primarily responsible for the local implementation and delivery of government services. The speaker was advising participants in the meeting about the likely manner of delivery of a particular upcoming government program—a project intended to facilitate the planting of black beans by subsidising the purchase of seed—and his statement was clearly intended to discourage efforts to directly solicit for inclusion in the upcoming project. It would be local organisations that would administer the project, his comments made clear; everything would be arranged officially by the appropriate local institutions, and there would be no point coming and asking to be personally included. This statement brought to the surface an instructive tension in conceptions of political process. For his assertion that 'everything comes from organisation', or that everything comes from *being organised*, resonated with a pervasive political sentiment which infused everyday discourse in Gualiqueme, running through the quotidian commentary and political analysis of villagers. But while for this FSLN functionary, being organised and direct solicitation were clearly taken to be opposed modes of administration, for Gualiqueme residents it might be suggested that the whole point of being organised was to enable acts of assistance to be effectively solicited.

In part, the widespread sense that everything comes from being organised emerged for Gualiqueme residents from the conjunction of organisation as a prerequisite for participation in NGO projects with the pervasive material evidence of what may be accessed through such projects. Many households are in possession of a range of tools and equipment which were originally received as a benefit of involvement in one NGO project or another. Villagers have received water filters

(which have invariably broken and are used simply as water storage containers), and large tins of expensive powdered baby formula. Gas cookers have been received—although replacement canisters were never purchased, and those that haven't been sold now sit in storage, unused—and chimneys have been installed in some kitchens; both from projects hoping to protect rural women from the dangers of smoke inhalation. Tools acquired through projects range from specialist equipment such as back-mounted water hoses, designed to equip a community team of firefighters, chemical sprays for applying inputs to crops, through to basic tools such as hoes, pickaxes and axes. Bricks visible in some minor building works were taken from demolished latrines originally built by a project, but rarely used because villagers considered them indecent, being too close to houses. Some houses possess large concrete water tanks, and a few have received systems of water collection to provide irrigation for household plants. Orchards of fruit trees in house plots or alongside agricultural land have been grown from saplings originally distributed by a series of projects hoping to improve nutrition and economic security. Barb-wire fencing, bags for planting coffee seedlings, and silos for storing harvested maize and beans have all been accessed through projects. Most recently, in accordance with a prevailing objective to establish 'food security' (*seguridad alimentaria*) among the rural poor, projects have frequently focused on encouraging the establishment of vegetable gardens, providing seeds, tools, and involving training sessions aimed at inculcating knowledge of nutritional needs and organic cultivation methods (cf., e.g., MAGFOR, 2009; Schejtman et al., 2004). Also crucial over the years has been the availability of micro-credit loans, access to which has been made conditional by a range of NGOs on participation in broad educational projects (Padilla, 2008).

Amid these pervasive reminders of the concrete possibilities being organised might offer, villagers spoke continually of which of their neighbours had managed to 'grab' (*agarrar*) or 'obtain / achieve' (*lograr*) some form of assistance through participation in the projects active at the time of research. We have already

encountered the term *agarrar* in its use in reference to local involvements with land, and, indeed, there were close parallels between the way in which ‘grabbed’ land was referred to, and discussions of the tools or seeds that a neighbour had managed to ‘grab’ by establishing themselves as a beneficiary of a project. And just as Chapter 4 showed how access to land was viewed as requiring vigorous *effort* in order to concretely realise the allocative potentials of local institutions (primarily the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative), so access to these benefits of development and welfare projects is constructed in such formulations as contingent upon a spirited effort of manoeuvre.

Ortega’s distributive politics: *Bonos* and *Beneficiados*

Perhaps the most notable and noted ‘projects’ in the village, however, are those that comprise the core of Ortega’s current distributive political strategy. The media persona cultivated by Ortega through official channels of communication, as was noted in Chapter 1, is overwhelmingly one which positions him as a source of transformative provision. Typical televised public appearances consist of lengthy readings of lists of communities or families benefited (*beneficiado*) by the latest round of Sandinista state benefits (*bonos*). State-owned media makes continual use of the image of thankful *beneficiados*, expressing their personal gratitude to ‘Daniel’.

In the context of the strongly Sandinista Gualiqueme, the most notable and widely discussed of these have been *Plan Techo* (‘roofing plan’, or ‘project roof’) and the *Bono Productivo* (‘production grant’). The former project involved distributions of corrugated iron roofing panels, in theory to those whose poverty had left them unable to purchase adequate roofing for themselves, and had had to make do with the improvised patchworks of rusted, tattered panels, plastic sheeting and other makeshift coverings so common throughout Nicaragua. In a country where the rainy season sees months of persistent and torrential rains, living with a substandard and leaking roof is a serious discomfort. The latter project, the *Bono Productivo*, aims to

improve the economic position of particularly-impooverished women by providing them with a selection of farm animals which, properly managed, could supply them with an independent income. As part of the project, participants are required to form local ‘nuclei’ and establish a mutual savings fund, with these groups eventually



Figure 22—An improvised roof in Gualiqueme.

intended to become cooperatives. Participants also received the materials required to construct a pen for the animals near their homes, seeds to plant feed, and the animals themselves; a cow, pig and chickens. They were also obliged to attend ongoing monthly training sessions aimed at teaching them technical skills related to the care of the animals, along with instruction regarding how to establish their future cooperative.

Over the course of my fieldwork, people made continual reference in everyday conversation to *Plan Techo* and the *Bono Productivo*. Although it is a somewhat impressionistic evaluation, it seemed clear to me that the degree of attention dedicated to the way these projects had played out, or might again in the future, outstripped the ‘objective’ economic value represented by being a beneficiary. In the case of *Plan Techo*, beneficiaries stood to receive ten sheets of corrugated iron roofing (zinc) from the government, free of charge. In fact, the *directiva* of the cooperative, responsible for administering the first round of actual distributions, had decided to spread the project further by giving five sheets each to double the number of beneficiaries.⁹⁴ To purchase a sheet of zinc cost 200 *córdobas*, and so the total value of the distribution stood at 1000-2000 *córdobas*. This is by no means an inconsiderable sum, and yet the value of a load⁹⁵ (*carga*) of coffee, during the fieldwork, varied from around 2600 *córdobas* to nearly 5000 *córdobas*. Models of behaviour based on cost-benefit calculations might predict that much more attention would be paid to the very real possibility of improving coffee yields in order to maximise income, as most small parcels owned by villagers operated at far less than optimum output. But to view the amount of attention paid to the possibilities of being a beneficiary of *Plan Techo* as simply a response to the stark economic value of the project, I suggest, is to overlook the extent to which such attention revolves around the ways in which the project intersects with crucial assumptions about the nature of power and the possibilities of politics, assumptions which play into the

⁹⁴ Less benign local interpretations insist that those responsible either kept the additional panels for themselves or gave the additional portions to preferred recipients, generally friends and family.

⁹⁵ A single ‘load’ (*carga*) of coffee amounted to 2 hundredweight in ‘*pergamino*’, which equates to approximately 1 hundredweight in *café oro*, after having gone through an additional drying process and being de-husked in larger processing centres (*beneficios*). The terms *pergamino* and *oro* refer to different stages in the coffee production process. *Pergamino* (lit. parchment) refers to the stage of the bean after the fruit has been removed. At this point the beans are dried, hand-sorted for defects by farmers themselves, and then sold. Processing centres subsequently perform an additional de-husking using automated machinery, which reveals the greenish-golden interior of the bean; hence the name *oro* (gold).

range of involvements with projects and the possibilities of being organised, and exploration of which constitutes the aim of this chapter.



Figure 23—Gualiqueme men handle a roofing panel during the construction of a new residential building.

Necessary distance, exteriority and being organised.

One crucial element of the sense of political possibility connoted by the theme of being organised for Gualiqueme residents involves an insistence that the benefits of being organised have to do with accessing *distant* abundance; establishing an involvement with external sources of value. It has been observed that Sandinista formulations of the value of collectivity, along with notions of community empowerment prevalent within discourses of development, frequently base themselves on a notion of *immanent* power emergent from collectivity itself. In Sandinista formulations, this frequently takes the form of emphasis of the value and generative potential of *unity*; the notion that by joining together, strength is aggregated, and that concrete benefits which might ensue from being organised are

primarily enabled by this latent political capability (Nuñez Soto, 1996). Indeed, congruent with this assumption, realising the state of being organised is often stipulated within state discourse as the primary purpose of projects. Speaking to the local coordinator of the *Bono Productivo* program, for example, she stated to me that the overall purpose of the project was to encourage beneficiaries to become organised (*organizada*); the requirement for each ‘nucleus’ of participants to form credit and savings cooperatives using their financial contributions was situated as the overall aim, over and above the economic gains of participation.

However, this notion of strength in numbers, of the inherent value of being organised as an end in itself, tended to be eschewed by Gualiqueme residents in favour of framing organisation as enabling solicitation (cf. Fisher, 2012); being organised was construed as enabling acts of solicitation to gain strength, legitimacy and recognition, and thus to have a greater chance of succeeding. Don Gregorio, for example, opined that the recent acquisition of individual taps by each household in the community, thanks to a water project run by an NGO, came as the consequence of the community’s collective strength in demanding such assistance, a strength gained by virtue of being organised. It was clear that he considered this status to be conferred by the ongoing organisational presence of the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative; the community as a whole was ‘organised’ by virtue of having been founded as a cooperative, and that accounted, in his opinion, for its success in attracting projects of different kinds.

This sense that the value of being organised emerged not from the immanent or inherent potential of collectivity, but rather in relation to the possibilities it opened up of gaining access to forms of abundance that originated *outside* and beyond the community was crucial. It was clear that participants in projects and the staff of NGOs, for example, frequently worked from rather different premises when articulating the point of participation. A few examples illustrate this divergence. On one occasion, I accompanied a tour of vegetable plots that had been organised by

participants in a ‘family garden’ (*huerto familiar*) project operated by NICARED. This NGO had undertaken a series of comparable projects in the community, working within the broad development remit of cultivating ‘food security’ (*seguridad alimentaria*). The managing director of the NGO, known locally as don Fransisco, was visiting in order to accompany the tour. Over the course of the day’s visits, he gave short talks to participants such as explaining key elements of the concept of food security and relating the aims of the project to the economic situation brought by recent swings in international commodity prices. But a theme that ran through his series of short talks was the importance of avoiding the creation of ‘beneficiaries’ (*beneficiarios*), avoiding a culture of dependency which meant that participants only expected to be helped and lost the incentive to strive independently for success. The point of the project, he made clear, was to build up a community organisation through which benefits social goods, such as the produce of the vegetable gardens, would be self-sustaining. The real gains of the project would be realised through the fostering of capabilities and skills among participants themselves; the role of his organisation was primarily a facilitatory and enabling one, working for the obstacles to these objectives—obstacles such as a lack of education—to be overcome.

Having completed the round of visits, the group ended up at the village primary school, where a vegetable garden had also been established. Participants were invited to give their opinions about the day’s activities, and José Alfaro spoke about his involvement, offering an interesting analysis of the kinds of economic success he considered this kind of project to enable. The reason some people in the village had failed to advance, he argued, was because they didn’t know how to properly take advantage (*aprochevar*) of projects like this one. He himself, he explained, had always made sure that he did his best to involve himself and to strive to make the most out of participation. The first organisation that had provided help

(*ayuda*), he said, was UNAG,⁹⁶ and he had managed to obtain '*ayudas*' of different kinds over the years; the citrus trees he had on his farm, seeds... His position as one of the more prosperous residents of Gualiqueme, he argued, was primarily due to his savvy in requesting and making the most of *ayudas* of this kind. It was, he argued, because of his assertive efforts to be helped that he had advanced. After a number of other participants had made comments, generally comprising positive evaluations of the day's event, one of the village school teachers gave a short closing speech, and her choice of theme was also revealing. She thanked don Fransisco for his help over the years, and pointed out that the purchase of the school's water tank had been funded by NICARED. Praising the director for his generosity, she expressed her hope that such support would continue to be available should the community need it. While Fransisco's discourse had emphasised the immanent capacity of the community to overcome its own problems, both José Alfaro and the school teacher's contributions emphasised the crucial place of external assistance, placing the impetus of desirable change upon the help of organisations and key individuals within them.

A comparable divergence in emphasis was evident during a regional meeting of various local chapters of the PROOR (*proyecto oscar romero*) group—a project with roots in liberation theology. This project has established local groupings which function as mutual savings and credit organisations, holding occasional meetings which allow the groups of each community to report back on their financial state of affairs. Speaking to the individual who convened the session I attended, Raul, he stressed the extent to which the structure of the meetings and the form the project has taken have been impelled by the participants themselves. He was keen to point out that it was *they*, not he, who proposed establishing the savings groups in the first place, allowing the project to develop from its origin as a charitable emergency response to the humanitarian crisis engendered by Hurricane Mitch. He clearly

⁹⁶ The Union Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos; this organisation played a significant role in the early years of the revolution as a political representative of rural people.

considered himself to have played a backseat role, merely facilitating—through such activities, he explained, as arranging the rental of chairs for the meetings—the priorities put forward and realised by participants themselves. He was in no sense the ‘leader’ of the organisation, he made clear.

However, during the course of the meeting he encountered some starkly contrasting readings of his own role in the organisation. When addressed as ‘don Raul’, as he repeatedly was, he persistently refused the honorific connotations of the title, requesting instead to be called simply ‘Raul’. And having announced that this was to be the last meeting in which he would play the role of convener, a series of individuals proceeded to stand up and make impromptu, celebratory speeches of thanks, each of them commending him for his commitment to the project and the successes that have come as a result. The majority of these contributions, indeed, emphasised the benefits of having participated in the project in highly personalised terms, constructing their own lives as having been positively improved as a result of the transformative influence of Raul himself. Raul was clearly somewhat uncomfortable with the hagiographic tones of these celebratory comments; one speaker even suggested that he would go down in local memory alongside Oscar Romero himself. At issue here, again, were competing readings of the origin and form of the productive, transformative potentials enabled by participation in the project. Raul was concerned to emphasise the extent to which transformative possibilities are enabled by the self-organising capabilities and autonomous capacities of participants themselves, while many participants articulated an image which constructed Raul himself as a transformative figure, whose personal input and intermediary capacity was the crucial factor. And indeed, the subtext of each of these celebratory statements, as with that addressed to don Francisco above, constituted an implicit but unambiguous request for continuing assistance.

In considering these divergent perspectives, it is useful, finally, to examine the critical observations of Jose Oliver, a member of *directiva* of the Sacuanjoche

cooperative. Jose Oliver's comments came at a time of financial difficulty for his cooperative. The coffee rust epidemic (see Chapter 2, and below) had led to many *socios* stating that they were unable to repay debts that they had taken out through the cooperative. Making reference to comments from one of 'Compañera' Rosario Murillo's recent radio broadcasts, he pointed out that the *Frente* was involved in an effort to undertake a program of moral renovation in the countryside. It was well-known among Sandinistas, he argued, that though the revolution achieved great things in getting rid of the dictatorship, it had produced some rather unintended results in rural culture. People had lost a sense of honour and respect that previously prevailed, he asserted. But amid this broad account of cultural decline, Jose Oliver spoke in a fascinating way about the way his cooperative was perceived as an institution by its members. He had attempted, he explained, to convey to his fellow members what he took to be the evident truth that their cooperative was nothing more and nothing less than *them*, working together. But his perspective, he lamented, seemed to fall on deaf ears. People seemed to insist upon treating the cooperative as if it was something apart from themselves, as if it was an external organisation that they could look to for support in times of need, but in whose institutional well-being they had no personal stake. From Jose Oliver's perspective, *socios* seemed to be frustratingly persistent in their efforts to solicit the cooperative leadership for support, while refusing to acknowledge personal or collective responsibility for the economic plight of the organisation. Again we have an apparent disjuncture between conceptualisations of the value of involvement in organisation, with rural Nicaraguans tending to prefer notions of exterior potency and abundance to forms of envisioning power as primarily immanent.

Now, in part Jose Oliver's discourse was framed by the frustration of financial difficulty, casting the failure among *socios* to repay debts as a moral issue rather than contextualising it in relation to lower coffee prices and a poor harvest. But I suggest that his analysis draws out a crucial feature of the prevailing rural discourse about

being organised. He observed that people were stubborn in their tendency to view the cooperative as something external, something separate from themselves. It is perhaps the case that his exhortations to his fellow members to reframe their perceptions of the cooperative fell on deaf ears—as with the apparently unsuccessful efforts of NGO staff to encourage a view of being organised based on the immanent possibilities of collectivity—because each of these perspectives fails to take into account the ways in which separation and distance are crucial and constitutive components of the vision of abundance cultivated in the broad ideal of being organised by most Gualiqueme residents. Jose Oliver’s vision of the cooperative’s real value as equating, simply, to the sum of its members accords with the Sandinista view of being organised as emerging from a notion of strength in numbers, the horizontal solidarities central to socialist traditions (Lyons, 2006). But most of the cooperative’s *socios* insisted that the point of being organised was to gain access to something that was above and beyond the aggregate of individual members, resolutely maintaining an image of a bountiful outside, access to which the cooperative might facilitate. Rather than a self-interested shirking of financial responsibility, Sacuanjoche *socios*, by situating the cooperative as an external agent, a body capable of responding to solicitations and imagined to have the wherewithal to function as a channel to envisaged sources of abundant assistance taken to lie elsewhere, cultivated a sense of the possibility of being organised that was founded upon a notion of productive distance. We shall see how this insistence on productive distance comes to inform understandings of political solicitation captured in the notion of ‘*gestionando*’. Firstly, however, I turn to a brief account of the ways in which this attribution of value to distant sources at first glance stands in some tension with an ideology of labour that grounds productivity in bodily struggle.

Accounting for prosperity: devil pacts and distributive abundance

We have seen, then, that participants in ‘projects’ tend to frame the benefit of being involved, and the value of being organised, in relation to notions of external abundance. This image of accessing distant prosperity, however, sits somewhat uneasily with certain assumptions which inform local criteria of efficacy and productivity, particularly those which insist that productivity and resulting abundance are crucially rooted in and legitimated by the struggle of labour. Indeed, the possibility of explicitly undermining the broad sense of value attributed to distributive possibilities, through reference to such assumptions, was certainly available to Gualiqueme residents, although it was not frequently pursued. I will briefly explore some examples of this dismissal of distributive possibilities, before examining what I take to be the more broadly pursued path of conceptual *accommodation*.

Wilber, for example, once complained to me at length about the status of two key individuals in the community, Porfirio and Jairo Torres. It could perhaps be stated that these were the two Gualiqueme residents with the strongest ties to extra-village organisations. Both of them had participated extensively over the years in Sandinista organisations of different kinds, and in the years since 1990 had each worked closely with numerous NGO projects that had been active in the village. In some ways, they stood as gatekeepers to the community, were considered both by residents and outsiders to be local ‘leaders’, and operated as intermediaries between residents and the broader institutional structures that impinged on village life. They also both frequently held positions of significant responsibility within the Rigoberto Cruz Cooperative, and Porfirio was elected president (for the second time, having served initially in the early years of the cooperative’s existence) towards the end of my period of research.

Materially, neither of them were in any obvious way extravagantly better off than other local families, but there is no doubt that their strong links to *organismos* guaranteed them a certain level of economic security. Perhaps the most evident outward sign of their statuses was that they each were among the few families in the village who owned motorbikes; Porfirio's was acquired as a parting 'gift' from UNAG, who he had worked with for years, and Carlos considered it, during the time of research, worthwhile to sell a *manzana* of coffee in order to buy the vehicle so that he was able to take up a position in the mayor's office.⁹⁷ However, the status and local authority accrued through their skill at navigating the institutional structures of government and NGO was hard to reckon with from the perspective of an ideology of value rooted in the intensive struggle of agricultural labour. I had once observed to Wilber that the two men appeared to be rather successful, that they had nice houses,⁹⁸ they owned motorbikes...

Wilber immediately cut me off. *You think because they have those nice houses they've got anything*, he asked? *No, man! Those two are up to their eyeballs in debt! Everything they've got came from organisations (organismos), and they're still in debt for the lot of it! That house that Jairo has came from a project (proyecto), and Porfirio's motorbike he was given by UNAG. You thought they had those things because they worked for them? No way! They've got nothing here, both of them are as*

⁹⁷ There were four motorbikes owned within the village at the time of research. No other motor vehicles were owned by Gualiqueme residents.

⁹⁸ To an outside eye, there was not a vast amount of material differentiation between residences within the village, although such differences as did exist were keenly perceived. Poorer people's houses might be identified by their tatty roofing (although state distributions of roofing panels meant that much new roofing had not been purchased), or smaller size. Concrete floors (in some cases etched and dyed to give the appearances of tiling) were present in a few houses. Only two residential houses in the village were of a strikingly different order of quality than the majority. One was a very large adobe house with barred windows and a large number of newly purchased roofing panels, built towards the end of the period of research by a shopkeeper who operated businesses in a number of nearby villages. The other was a breeze-block building with steel rafters, also fully-equipped with new zinc, which had in fact been constructed by Esperanza's migrant daughter. She and her Costa Rican husband had invested in the property—and were still incrementally adding finishing touches to it—and had plans to one day move in, but they continued to live and work in Costa Rica at the time of research.

poor as anything (pobrecito)! They've got nothing, they've not got farms (fincas) here at all. Neither of them have ever liked to work, the two of them just prefer to go to meeting after meeting. That's the only reason either of them have got anything, because they always go around with organisations (andan con organismos). How can they be working hard when they spend all of their time going to meetings?

He proceeded to list the people he considered to be genuinely well-off in the village, each evaluated on the basis of the size of their holdings in land, and the visible evidence of their daily vigour in cultivating their farms. The disjunction is clear here between the evident material benefits available to those competent at navigating local administrative structures, and the widely prevailing assumption that work equates to labouring the land, and that value is properly rooted in such struggle (Gudeman, 2012; Gudeman and Rivera, 1990; Taussig, 1980).

Wilber's evaluation, then, assumed that prosperity was necessarily a correlate of properly worked land. Comparable assumptions were at play during one discussion among Wilber, his mother Esperanza, and Alexis, when the latter had been talking about his possible plans to try and sell up his *derecho* in the cooperative to some rich buyer and move elsewhere. Esperanza advised Alexis that if he really wanted to sell, the best person to approach would be don Manuel, a timber merchant with whom the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative had established a longstanding business relationship. Don Manuel was known to have been good for a loan in the past, Esperanza stated, and he was clearly rich enough to buy up a bit of land. But Wilber objected to this somewhat angrily, insisting that don Manuel was by no means one of the monied rich (*un rico de plata*), but rather that he was a '*luchador, como nosotros*'. This phrase translates more or less as 'one who struggles, like us', and implicitly asserted that don Manuel's success was a product of the vigorous efforts of his labour, not the incomprehensible and apparently groundless privilege of the genuinely rich (*los ricos*).

That the legitimacy of wealth and prosperity in local reckoning has to do with the *effort* of labour, it can be observed, is also abundantly clear in the rich local accounts of devil pacts discussed in Chapter 3, phenomena which appear throughout rural Latin America (Edelman, 1994; Jansen and Roquas, 2002; Nash, 1979; Taussig, 1980). Tales also abound locally of diabolic ‘prayers’ (*oraciones*) understood to be available to villagers well-practiced in witchcraft, many of which revolve around the same theme of enabling the generation of wealth without the arduous sweat of labour. For example, one such prayer enables its user to set their machete working in the fields while they relax at home, allowing them to simply turn up at the end of the day and collect the tool to take home along with their automatically-prepared harvest. Constituting a potent indigenous ‘labour theory of value’,⁹⁹ such sentiments might be assumed to underwrite evaluations such as those described above about wealth accessed through participation in organisations.

Indeed, if the theme of diabolic assistance stands as a resource for making sense of forms of prosperity which confound the notion that struggle and effort underpins value, it could be expected that villagers such as Wilber might make reference to devil pacts in evaluating the apparent advancement of individuals fluent in navigating the institutions of distributive assistance. Such associations were, to be sure, very occasionally drawn. Esperanza, for example, once commented to me that involvement with *organismos* was extremely dangerous (*peligrosísimo*). The suggestion was prompted—the context of the conversation made clear—by the murder in recent years of a village resident who had been prominently involved with a number of NGOs. Observing that those most involved (*más metido*) in organisations appeared to gain access to a ready flow of resources, loans, and other forms of support, Esperanza was led to speculate that there was a possibility that such

⁹⁹ Cf. Gudeman and Rivera (1990, p30), who note that ‘Our attention was also drawn to the fact that the exercise of labour yielded property rights, for this suggested to us that a rudimentary “labour theory of value” was being used.’

individuals could be *impactado*; the strong implication of her suggestion being that the recent death may have been a case of the delivery (*entrega*) of one such unfortunate soul.

This line of thinking, however, was as far as I am aware very rarely pursued (the example I have cited is the only instance I encountered during my fieldwork). Discussions of pacts, though very much a vital point of reference in everyday conversation, were primarily oriented towards evaluations of the elites of the days prior to the revolution, or the exiled Cuban tobacco bosses who operate commercial enterprises in the region of Estelí. These narratives, therefore, seemed concerned with much vaster differentiations of socioeconomic status and wealth than existed within the village at the time of research. The lack of local attention to this particular way of framing distributive abundance, then, can in part be attributed to the relatively modest degrees of prosperity that appeared to be available through adept navigation of ‘assistentialist’ structures. However, I suggest that even more relevant here is the way in which local elaboration of a key concept, *gestionando*, served to render the benefits of being organised *compatible* with an ideology of effort. This crucial idea, it can be seen, by framing distributive abundance as primarily an effect of ‘movement’ (*movimiento*), worked to reach a form of conceptual accommodation with this form of apparent affluence. While devil pact theories offer the prospect of situating distributive prosperity as radically other, villagers seem to have eschewed such a potential framing in favour of a construct which works to weave the idea of externally-derived abundance into norms of value grounded in physical struggle.

***Gestionando* and political leadership**

What became clear throughout the varying references among Gualiqueme residents to the prospects of being organised was that envisaged ‘material’ benefits, imagined as flowing in from outside, were in large part understood to have been secured through acts of ‘*gestión*’, and that the realisation of public works, projects and other

interventions were viewed as having been brought about through the performance of this key mode of political activity. It is consequently worth analysing in some detail this idea of *gestión*, in order to explore what I suggest amounts to a distinctive way of viewing historical process, transformative potential, and political power. As a verb—*gestionar* (gerund: *gestionando*)—the term can be translated variously as ‘negotiate’, ‘arrange’ or ‘sort out’. It is also frequently used by villagers as a noun—*un gestión*¹⁰⁰ (pl. *gestiones*)—which implies a single act of active negotiation, solicitation, or an instance of sorting out a discrete need or goal. The following examples illustrate this usage.

When I asked don Lucas, a founding member of the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative, what was involved in a *gestión*, he responded with the example of a scenario in which a villager dies, leaving their family with the economic difficulties attendant upon arranging for burial and commemorative events appropriately. A coffin needs to be purchased, and traditional Catholic *novena* (‘ninth day’) observances require the purchase of food and drink as refreshments for attendees. In such a situation, he explained, some local leader acting as an intermediary (he gave the example of himself) would need to undertake a *gestión* with the mayor to try and cover these ritual expenses. The individual performing the *gestión* would need to go to town in order to obtain an audience with the mayor, explain the situation, persuade the mayor of the family’s plight and pressing need for assistance, and thereby secure funds or material contributions, which would be passed on to the person in question.

Irving, a politically-active youth in the village, responded to a similar query with a different example. I had intended to ask him whether to *gestionar* meant ‘to arrange’, but clumsily used the word *arreglar*, which can indeed mean ‘sort out’, but

¹⁰⁰ Examples of the kinds of phrases using the term might include ‘I need to go to town tomorrow to do a *gestión*.’, or ‘our cooperative has been very successful in its *gestiones*.’

might also denote 'fix' or 'mend'. He immediately replied that this (however he understood my proposed definition) was not its meaning, and explained with an illustration. A *gestión*, he said, is when you try and acquire benefits (*beneficios*) on behalf of other people. It involves drawing up a list of names, he stated explicitly, and submitting this list to someone who has the power to do something about it. For example, he said, if you need some educational materials, you will first go round getting a list of all the names of potential beneficiaries (*los beneficiados*) who need these materials, and then go and give the list to the mayor or whoever is in a position to help.

To give a third example which illustrates a somewhat different frame of reference, members of the Sacuanjoché cooperative also frequently spoke of the ongoing activities of their cooperative *directiva* as comprising a series of *gestiones*, by which term they were variously referring to efforts to secure loans from higher level cooperatives or financial organisations, efforts to renegotiate the terms and repayment schedules of existing debts, and dealings with NGOs aimed at securing the provision of the kinds of projects which use cooperatives as an intermediary between the NGO and a particular local community.

These examples make clear a number of key points about local understandings of *gestionando*. Firstly, *gestiones* are taken to be acts of mediation by local leaders between potential beneficiaries (frequently characterised as being in a position of need), and individuals or organisations in a position of power or influence, viewed as being capable of meeting or resolving those needs. Though two of the examples provided refer to solicitations aimed at the mayor, it should be made clear that *gestiones* are seen as being possible and appropriate with anyone with the perceived economic or political position to achieve results. I myself was initially somewhat taken aback when, while conducting a preliminary village census, I was asked whether I might, rather than bother people with questions during a busy harvest season, instead be able to build a secondary school in the village. What I

initially took to be based on mistaken assumptions about the degree of my presumed wealth, I later came to see as a characteristic act of *gestionando*. The sense that entreaties to potentially-powerful individuals to meet a need were the most appropriate way to seek to achieve public goods entirely accords with this pervasive sentiment in rural Nicaragua.

A further crucial characteristic of *gestiones* is a strong association of the negotiation and solicitation involved in such acts with physical movement, as don Lucas' and Irving's definitions made clear. The need to actively travel, to go here and there, to appear in person so as to be able to persuade and performatively impinge upon the will of the target of the request is a central feature of these understandings of political possibility. This emphasis on movement in the depiction of what is involved in solicitation is, most basically, simply a necessary correlate of the current state of communication technologies, and associated face-to-face modes of personal and political interaction. Many villagers have made trips to town in order to take their place in a queue at the mayor's office, in order to make some request for assistance, or enquire as to the possibilities of being a beneficiary of an upcoming project. Travelling in person is simply the only option. Partly, too, this association with travel and movement has to do with the fact of the national government being based in Managua; in various contexts people would speak of complaints about arrangements for projects needing to be taken to Managua in order to seek a resolution. But such associations, I would argue, contribute towards a broader conception that the kinds of *gestionando* required in order to be able to influence the orientation of relevant transformative powers require travel, require movement, and thus are associated with the energetic expenditures of transport. Given this orientation, it becomes even more appropriate to describe such assumptions regarding transformative possibility using spatial terms such as 'distant' or 'external'. Active movement across space here comprises a necessary feature of *gestiones* which aim to secure the intervention and intercession of distant transformative potencies.

Critical commentaries among villagers regarding the comparative performance of two local mayors provide an example of the way these ideas contributed towards evaluations of political practices. Numerous residents of Gualiqueme had come to the conclusion that the mayor of Condega was failing to adequately deliver and distribute sufficient supportive benefits such as the *Plan Techo*, and that the mayoress¹⁰¹ of a neighbouring municipality of Telpaneca, in contrast, was providing her constituents abundantly with such projects. I will return to this situation in detail in Chapter 7, but for the moment it is sufficient to observe that these commentaries were frequently formulated in terms of an opposition between the active physical movement of the mayoress of Telpaneca, as compared to the perceived inertia of Condega's equivalent figure. The mayoress, people told me, was constantly out and about undertaking *gestiones*, even to the extent of travelling abroad, and had recently been visiting Costa Rica securing benefits for her constituents. The causal relationship between this impression of intensive movement and her perceived access to copious distributive resources was taken for granted in these accounts. A lack of equivalent abundance within the municipality of Condega was seen as a direct consequence of the mayor's failure to sufficiently move himself about in acts of active *gestión*.¹⁰² In order to further elucidate the ways in which this model of leadership inflected local political life, it will be useful to explore the case of Porfirio, who found these ideas deployed in evaluations of his role as president of Rigoberto Cruz cooperative.

¹⁰¹ I use this term to retain the gendered dimension of the Spanish, *alcaldesa*.

¹⁰² It should also be noted that Daniel Ortega himself was widely viewed as having successfully cultivated beneficial international ties for Nicaragua through precisely these kinds of energetic negotiation, particular in relation to the figure of Hugo Chavez, until his death in 2013. The figure of the president, taken by Gualiqueme residents to be the primary source within Nicaragua of benefits accessible through *gestiones*, was himself understood to obtain his own resources (and consequent transformative potency) through exemplary acts of *gestión*.

The difficulties of leadership

In the face of the assumptions and expectations outlined above, it is perhaps not surprising that formal and informal leaders within the community frequently found themselves under considerable pressure. It is worth exploring these pressures for what they also reveal about the confluence of contributing assumptions pertaining to social and political efficacy and productivity. Porfirio, who was elected president of Rigoberto Cruz cooperative during the course of my fieldwork, took the reins of the cooperative during financially difficult times. As discussed in Chapter 2, the 2012/3 coffee harvest across Nicaragua was severely affected by an outbreak of ‘rust’ disease (*la roya*); self-reported harvest levels¹⁰³ suggest that yields stood at around half of that of the 2011/2 season. Prices at the time of the outbreak had also plummeted to approximately half of where they stood the previous year, which suggest that coffee incomes were probably around a quarter for most families.¹⁰⁴ In the context of a global economic downturn, micro-credit loans intended for improving coffee yields—which in previous years might have been diverted by recipients towards subsistence and living costs in order to tide over the gap between harvests—were also almost completely unavailable. These dire economic circumstances were reflected for

¹⁰³ Questions regarding the reliability of available quantifications of harvest levels were being asked throughout the time of my fieldwork. In particular, there appeared to be concern among leaders of PRODECOOP, a second level cooperative through which the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative obtains credit, that their own data (which showed approximately a 50% lower quantity of coffee *delivered* by its members within the village) didn't reflect true production levels. There was concern that members might have been using the rust crisis as a convenient cover story, and delivering their relatively unaffected coffee harvests to private sellers or other purchasing cooperatives in order to avoid the automatic debt repayments that would have been deducted from amounts paid for coffee delivered to PRODECOOP. Based on what I was able to discover, I consider this uncharitable interpretation to be unwarranted as a general explanation for the failure of members of Rigoberto Cruz to repay PRODECOOP's loan. Although it is impossible to eliminate uncertainty, other organisations where comparable disincentives to repay loans did not exist also found members comparably struggling to repay; and other cooperatives whose members had no similar incentive to dissemble production levels reported comparable reductions in harvest as compared to the 2011/2012 season.

¹⁰⁴ Such calculations need to be contextualised further, however, with the fact that the problems of rust were unevenly distributed. Many individuals reported themselves as having been affected very little or not at all, while others, catastrophically, lost more or less their whole harvest.

many villagers in severe difficulties making ends meet, with many running out of maize months prior to the subsequent harvest, and facing the miserable prospect of subsisting on green bananas instead of tortillas.

Although villagers were fully aware of the above kinds of ecological, economic framings of a bleakly unfavourable climate, responsibility for consequent economic hardships—in reference to the ideas about *gestionando* outlined above—was frequently seen to lie in a failure of personal initiative on the part of the incumbent president. I had heard considerable criticism of the previous president during his incumbency, ranging from accusations of nepotism (*famialismo*), of grabbing all the benefits for himself, and of ‘envious’ refusal to allow others to share in the benefits he was able to access and mediate through his position. However, once he had been voted out of the presidency, accounts of his time in office tended to colour his activities in a considerably more positive light. Although he may have occasionally behaved badly, people began to say, at least he knew how to ‘move himself’ (*moverse*). By this term people referred to the vigorous geographical motion inherent in local understandings of *gesiontando*, as described above. Such comments were often accompanied by direct criticism of the new president, suggesting that Porfirio, by contrast, had been ‘doing nothing’. The clear implication of such critiques was that sufficient movement on the part of a president would have been enough to ameliorate the difficult situation to some degree.

These criticisms were in large part made in reference to the specific failure of the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative *directiva* to finalise a deal with a prospective timber merchant in order to be able to make the yearly sale of pine from the cooperative-owned forest, and thereby perform the subsequent distribution of the profits between members. Although yearly profits per member amount, approximately, only to

between 500 and 1000 *córdobas*¹⁰⁵ per socio, they come at a time when cash is in short supply, and thus are widely looked forward to as a source of economic reprieve at the hardest time of the year. That the *directiva* were delayed in making the sale was a source of considerable frustration. There were also widespread hopes that the coffee rust epidemic would lead to government assistance of some kind for producers, and although official announcements at the time made clear that direct economic assistance would not be forthcoming, hopes that the possibility might nonetheless be brought about, should local leaders perform sufficiently forceful *gestiones*, were nevertheless pervasive (Mendoza Vidaurre, 2013).

Speaking to Porfirio about these expectations and disappointments, he commented that the fact was that arrangements for the sale of the timber had been held up by the complex process of securing permissions from the state environmental agency, which had to perform a series of inspections before permits to fell trees were granted. But, he complained astutely, people tended to assume that if only a president ‘move himself’ (*se mueve*), such technicalities would be quickly and easily resolved, and so they saw the delays to the sale as his own personal fault. His view was that people simply didn’t understand the details of what was involved, that they thought it was just a matter of forceful negotiation.

Though his dissatisfaction with such thinking and sense of injustice is perhaps justified, what is most notable for our purposes regarding these discontented views are what they take for granted about political and economic support. Assistance or economic reprieve from the hardships of a crisis were assumed to be *potentially* available, given the appropriately energetic and mobile activity of solicitation on the part of community representatives; individuals seen as standing in

¹⁰⁵ Approximately five to ten day’s wages for a day labourer at going rates at the time of fieldwork. 100 *córdobas* was the standard price for a day’s labour in the area at the time, although slightly higher wages were paid by employers with greater resources, and lower amounts often paid if food was being provided by the employer.

positions of mediation between the community itself and distant, external sources of support. The fact that substantial support—either in the form of timber sales, available credit, or government assistance—had not arrived in the community, was taken to be due to insufficient effort directed towards the kinds of *gestiones* that secure such supportive transactions.

Conclusion

The construction of the value of being organised among Gualiqueme residents, then, posits it as having to do with figures of distant power capable of intervening to assist, and stipulates that the potency of local assistance has to do primarily with such external sources of value. While notions of distant abundance don't easily square with longstanding views of prosperity as being primarily founded upon and legitimated by the struggle of labour, local understandings of what is involved in key acts of solicitation—*gestiones*—reconcile notions of tapping distant plenitude with bodily effort. The possibility of becoming a participant in diverse 'projects'—ranging from those intended to facilitate the production of organic manure, the growing of vegetables, the rectification of gender inequalities or the construction of infrastructural or sanitation facilities, through to state welfare programs such as *Plan Techo* and the *Bono Productivo*—has come to be evaluated in relation to this set of key stipulations, and the pervasive character of such projects, impinging upon almost all aspects of local life, serves to magnify and multiply the ways in which this nexus of productive possibilities appears relevant. The possibility of 'being organised', refracted through assumptions about distant value and *gestionando*, thus comes to appear as a pervasive sentiment that given the right kind of struggle, realised through the right kind of vigorous solicitation, a relationship of vital assistance might be secured with outside powers.

Considering this in relation to the discussion of the previous chapter, we might state that in the respective fields of domesticity and assistentialist politics,

certain key propositions about what is required for efficacy are held in common. In both domains, efficacy and productivity is held to be contingent upon the mediation of crucial separations, such that valued forms of incorporation can be obtained. In neither domain is action understood to be viable on the basis of capacities internal to the person alone; rather, it depends upon securing a relation of involvement with exterior sources of potency. In the case of domestic ideals, the problem is achieving a practical resolution of the inherent volatilities of male and female potentials, such that mutuality might be established across gendered difference. In the domain of political assistance, the problem is how to establish a working incorporation of external sources of power with localised and bodily capacity, particularly that of the daily struggle of labour. We have seen how the notion of performing '*gestiones*' serves to perform certain mediation between these divergent productive principles, achieving an accommodation between assistance and struggle.

This set of ideas stands as compelling model of political power for Gualiqueme residents. However, knowledge of how things might or should work in theory by no means guarantees satisfaction with the way distributive political processes have played out in practice, as the account of Porfirio's difficulties has already indicated. In the next chapter, we will turn to an exploration of the ways in which the failure of this model of political efficacy to play out as hoped has come to be accounted for. We will see that longstanding assumptions regarding the malignant potency of 'envy' (*envidia*) has provided a convenient conceptual resource, allowing political frustrations and disappointments to be accounted for, and informing a local political mobilisation aimed at ensuring that the model does indeed operate as it should.

Chapter 7—The dangers of envy in the field of assistentialist politics

A madman on the loose

At one point during the period of research, rumours began to spread among residents of Gualiqueme that a wandering madman (*un loco*) had found his way into the vicinity of the village. Radio reports had, so I was told, recently alerted listeners of a murderer on the run from police, a man who had killed three women near his hometown near Yalí a considerable distance from the village. Some speculated that the man must be attempting to pay off a ‘pact’ (*pacto*), making good on a commitment to the devil to deliver (*entregar*) a certain number of souls. And over the course of the next few days, villagers reported a series of sightings of the madman. He was apparently surprised, for example, while sleeping in the pine forest overlooking the village by one resident out collecting firewood early in the morning, taking flight as soon as his hiding place had been discovered. Another much-recounted sighting depicted him walking right through the middle of the village itself in the middle of the night. It should be noted that amid the countless retellings, each of the claimed sightings was hotly debated, and alternative explanations for what had been seen were at times offered; but nevertheless, the atmosphere of nervousness and caution the rumours generated was palpable. Alexis, for example, explained to me that he had cancelled a journey he had been planning to take to visit a relative to avoid leaving his house unnecessarily. Margarita described how she had been terrified when she saw some shadowy figures outside of her house one night, which in fact turned out to be just a couple of drunks (*bolos*), young men from the village. For a few days, every trip I took was preceded by a string of cautions, warnings and attempts at dissuasion from my hosts.

Now, in many ways this incident was of course simply a one-off, a transient and localised panic fuelled by rumour and nervous speculation. But it could also be

considered that the anxieties revealed in such an unsettling construction of a mysterious itinerant killer are paradigmatic; indicative of concerns that inform a range of local phenomena. Unseen, but known to be there; unspecified, but specific in the threat he posed; this image of an unfamiliar and dangerous stranger wandering out-of-control and volatile within the midst of the village, I suggest, can in fact help point towards a useful analytic perspective regarding local ideas about envy; and in a way that helps to resolve what at first sight appear to be a contradictory tension in the ethnographic material.

Envy as the negation of productivity

The thesis up to this point has documented a number of distinct contexts for understanding rural Nicaraguan constructions of efficacy and the prospect of productivity. Previous chapters have worked to develop a vocabulary intended to capture these prevailing assumptions about what is required for productive action to be properly realised in the world. It has been seen that across a range of settings—from everyday domestic labour and the reproduction of the household, to involvements with state and NGO distributive political interventions—a distinctive construction of productivity emerges; one which demands the always-tenuous containment and co-involvement of diverse and separate potentials, and the effort to imbricate distant powers by means of bodily struggle. This conception has been demonstrated to be integrally related to the everyday performance and establishment of appropriate dependencies through quotidian acts of labour, exchange and distribution.

The previous chapter has indicated some of the ways in which this everyday ideology of productivity has come to be entangled with the institutional context of relevance for rural Nicaraguans; one of NGO and state ‘projects’ with crucial distributive components. That chapter showed how the key political concept of *gestionando* served to integrate on the one hand this nexus of ideas about efficacy

and productivity—the need for proper dependencies and the mutual containment of complementary capacities—and on the other the hierarchical political and institutional structures impacting on life in the village.

The description of the institutional context of the previous chapter, along with argument pursued thus far, however, together make one key aspect of the prevailing indigenous complex of assumptions pertaining to personhood and efficacy show up as highly problematic, and that might be summarised as the phenomenon of ‘envy’. It has already been noted that both state and NGO projects explicitly intend their projects to foster and cultivate solidarity and unity, taking these to be cardinal political values (Fisher, 2012). Distributive acts are intended to either tap into an existing social unity—the cohesive value of ‘community’ celebrated in some development theory (e.g., Ife and Tesoriero, 2006; Mansuri and Rao, 2004)—or to bring about transformations in subjectivity such that collectivity comes into being as a vital social force (Montoya, 2012b; Saldaña-Portillo, 2003). In addition, the understandings of *gestionando* described in the previous chapter place crucial importance on the agentive capacities of local leaders to mediate and facilitate access to distant, ‘higher’ strata of political power.

Each of these phenomena, however, might be seen as standing in tension with the observation that in innumerable contexts—and spanning a diverse range of registers from the mundane to the spiritual—rural Nicaraguans construct other agents as being primary sources of danger.¹⁰⁶ In particular, the notion of envy (*envidia*) holds a privileged place in local explanatory and ethical repertoires, working to constitute misfortune, failure and disappointment as primarily a consequence of the malicious interventions of nearby others. At times understood as a malignant spiritual potency whose disembodied capacities are realised

¹⁰⁶ In stark opposition, therefore, to the discourse prevailing in Sandinista rhetoric and policy, which construes connections with others as being positive sources of diverse social goods, such as the capacity to marshal collective political force in favour of class interests.

independently of conscious intentions (such as with ideas about the evil eye)—at others viewed as manifest in the conscious wrongdoing of intentional villains—the dangers of envy are invoked as accounting for any number of undesired occurrences and everyday misfortunes, ranging through illness and theft, to disappointments in relation to governmental distributions, or exclusion from NGO projects or cooperative benefits.

Corrosive, constructive envy: a tension in the literature

The tension identified here can perhaps be related to a comparable sense of paradox identifiable within the canon of ethnographic literature pertaining to Central America, and to peasant societies more generally. As has already been outlined in Chapter 1, classic ethnographic accounts frequently assert that the striking prevalence of ideas about the dangerousness and malignancy of envy, ideas which cast neighbours as sources of malign possibility, result in rural people being culturally disinclined towards and/or socially incompatible with collective or cooperative endeavours (Foster, 1965, 1979; Gudeman, 1976; Popkin, 1979). Rural cultures across the globe have been viewed as exhibiting a culture of suspicion inimical to social bonds beyond the family. The notion of *trust* as a key facilitator of collective ventures is operative here; any such enterprise, it is assumed, is likely to break down amid distrust and mutual accusation among people who construct their fellows and contemporaries as the most probable sources of threat and danger.

The literature, however—in the case of Foster's study, within the same text—also frequently reads a variety of seemingly collectivity-generating or communally-oriented social practices as being informed and functionally-sustained by the same ideas about the dangers of envy (in particular Foster, 1979, but see also; Scott, 1976; Wolf, 1986). Willingness historically to undertake the expense of participation in *cargos* throughout Central America, for example, has been read as prompted by the fear of others' potential envy, which is assumed to pose a mortal threat (Cancian,

1972). Redistributive measures taken to operate as economic ‘levelling mechanisms’ are understood to be imposed upon individuals by the community, with fear of this dangerous envy understood to be a crucial element enforcing these social mechanisms (Foster, 1965, 1972; Scott, 1976). In sum, on the one hand local constructions of envy are assumed to foster a distrust and suspicion that inhibits any possibility of collective social formations. On the other, the same ideas are taken to underlie practices constitutive of community itself.

This chapter will explore this apparent tension through charting the everyday depiction of the dangers of envy (*envidia*), aiming to explore the way such assumptions have come to inform local involvements with the key institutional and political context described in the previous chapter. After clarifying a number of distinct ways in which *envidia* is assumed to operate, the chapter will present a case study which describes a scenario in which critical evaluations formed in part through reference to notions of *envidia* came to inform a significant micro-political movement within the field community. It will be argued that envy is best analysed here as working to construct the *negation* of local ideas about productivity and efficacy described in the thesis thus far. Instead of being viewed as functionally operating either to shore up or work against ‘community’ or ‘collectivity’, the qualities attributed to envy can best be viewed as operating conceptually to construct a pure negation of prevailing ideas about the right kinds of relation, those relations required for productivity. Envy and its destructive capacity stands as anti-productivity, anti-possibility, anti-efficacy; with this negation cast in a particular light by prevailing assumptions about the proper relations required for viable life. With productive relations requiring the mutual containment of complementary potentials through the everyday performance of crucial co-dependencies, the envious actor stands as the epitome of *un*-contained and *in*-dependent agency. The striking resonance depicted above of the prospect of a madman on the loose, I suggest, taps into the same pressing concern with the danger of entirely uncontained actor;

illustrating the wild and pathogenic potency assumed to accrue to human potentials that escape the mutual containments which ongoing practices of exchange constantly strive for.

The case study to be explored below will make clear the extent to which such assumptions bring with them the possibility of critique, and raise the prospect of particular forms of mobilisation emerging in relation to these ideals. While viewing envy as the inverse of solidarity has led scholars to surmise that ‘suspicion’ inhibits collectivity, the case presented here makes clear that, instead, analysing envy as the negation of prevailing views of productivity illuminates the ways in which notions of envy can serve, conversely, to motivate efforts to establish the right kinds of social ties. Far from being simply opposed to organisation, concerns about envy here underpin ardent efforts to bring to fruition the envisioned possibilities of ‘being organised’ explored in the previous chapter. The chapter will additionally serve to offer a useful counterweight to perspectives which cast ‘dependency’ as serving simply to tie subaltern populations into relations of inequality and domination (Ferguson, 2013a), and will illustrate instead an instance in which evaluations framed by notions of proper and productive forms of dependency prompted a group of rural Nicaraguans to take matters into their own hands.

The diversity of envy

In developing the argument of this chapter, however, I do not wish to imply that ideas about envy take a singular form among rural Nicaraguans. Indeed, there is considerable diversity in the ways in which the dangers of envy are taken to present themselves, and it is worth beginning by outlining some of the distinct—yet undoubtedly intertwined and mutually-entangled—ways in which such dangers are construed. Ranging from psychological views which construe envy as the motivating factor underpinning inhuman acts, through to concerns which assume the emotion

to escape the bounds of the body and cause direct damage, this range of perspectives is unanimous in reading envy as the primary factor in accounting for misfortune.

‘Psychological’ envy

At times, envy is understood in a psychological register, viewed as an all-too-common emotional state that motivates certain kinds of action. One resident of the village, for example, suspected that the injury and death of two oxen he had purchased a few years previously had been the product of an act of physical assault, an attack he assumed to have been undertaken by some unknown neighbour, whose envy compelled them to destroy, as he put it, these fine animals that they longed to themselves possess. Envy’s inherent perversity, from this perspective, provides a comprehensible rationale for actions which would otherwise be inexplicable. This aggrieved man’s mother recounted the same loss in a slightly different register, describing the primary cause of death of the animals as being due to the malicious refusal to pass on the information that they had been wounded. In her account, the injuries themselves were taken to have been sustained in some unknown way, but what was certain was that people would have seen them in the pasture land, wounded and suffering, and yet refrained from informing her son in time for him to do anything about it. Blame was shifted from specific criminals to a broad community of witnesses who refrained from doing anything to help. She had no doubt, though, that this refusal itself was similarly the product of envy.

That direct and intentional acts of vandalism are carried out under the influence of envious feeling is widely taken for granted. In Chapter 5 I referred to the fact that the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative organises yearly fire patrols in the hottest months of the year. One villager explained to me the importance of such patrols, recounting a year in which the pine caught aflame, leading to a substantial area of the forest being burnt to the ground and a corresponding amount of potential income lost to cooperative members. When I asked if anyone knew what had started the

blaze, his response was simply to suggest that someone had evidently seen something that looked nice, and so they decided to destroy it. Though not using the term *envidia* explicitly, the same logic of resentful malice structured his account; indeed, it is self-evident to villagers that such jealous motivations are entirely plausible. It was evident that my interlocutor understood the purpose of the fire patrols to be only secondarily aimed at ensuring that any fires that *do* start are spotted and combated quickly. The primary aim, it was clear, was to *police* the area of the forest such that potential envy-driven vandals might be dissuaded from trying anything, or be caught in the act. The possibility that fire might start independently of malicious human agency did not appear to be entertained.¹⁰⁷

The idea of envy also served as a key interpretative trope employed when making sense of any number of local political tensions. At one point during the time of research, for example, a minor conflict centred on water usage and the right to draw irrigation from local streams led to the intervention of municipal authorities. Residents of the lower-altitude village of El Zapote, whose water supplies in large part flowed through or emerged out of land comprising part of the Rigoberto Cruz Cooperative's title, had complained to the mayor's office that they were suffering from shortages as a consequence of Gualiqueme residents' irrigation during the dry season.¹⁰⁸ After a visit from municipal inspectors to investigate the situation, an irrigation curfew was imposed, requiring villagers to draw water for their fields only

¹⁰⁷ Pina-Cabral (1986, p45) makes a comparable observation of rural Portugal: 'It is significant that the periodic fires which burn down enormous expanses of the country's forests are seldom blamed on the dryness of the summer season, on the widespread use of fireworks, or on the inefficiency of forestry policy. Rather, they are usually blamed on things taken as symbols of the antisocial forces which besiege society, that is 'the communists', the greedy acquisitiveness of wood merchants, or the jealousy of neighbours.'

¹⁰⁸ Irrigation in the area is almost entirely gravity-powered, and works simply by submerging one end of a length of plastic tubing in an uphill stream, and using the pressure generated by the force of the water's downhill flow to power mechanical sprinklers. Only a handful of villagers use irrigation to grow crops, however, as the required piping is expensive. Having access to such irrigation enables farmers to grow an additional crop of maize during the dry months when market prices are highest; and in years when money is available, there is high local demand for 'green' maize after months of eating only tortilla.

after a certain time each day. Doña Griselda—whose husband Gregorio is one of the handful of villagers who make extensive use of irrigation through the dry season—made it clear that she viewed the complaints of the El Zapote residents also to be products of envy, rather than fair protests based on genuine shortages. *They complain like that every year*, she stated. *They see nice things growing in our fields all year round and they don't want others to have things they don't have.*

Such sentiment at times focused on the actions and perceived motivations of local leaders. Roger, echoing an analysis I'd heard several times from other villagers, insisted to me that the community had been deprived of a valuable housing project precisely because of the envy of cooperative leaders. Several years previously, a substantial project had been constructed on the outskirts of the nearby town, comprising dozens of breezeblock residences equipped with new corrugated iron roofing and concrete floors. These highly desirable dwellings, Roger asserted, had originally been earmarked for beneficiaries among the population of the village, and would have completely transformed the circumstances of some of the poorest residents. The deal had already been done by the mayor, and it was all due to go ahead. But when the then-president of the cooperative discovered that he would not be able to arrange for himself and his family to be beneficiaries, as Roger told it, he immediately sabotaged the project, jealously petitioning the mayor to give the houses to needier people elsewhere.

Witchcraft and envy

In addition to these instances where envy is read as motivating direct physical vandalism or malicious political intervention, there are many cases where envy is viewed as the root cause of damage that is in fact carried out through the medium of witchcraft (*brujeria*). Particularly prevalent among Evangelical villagers—although by no means restricted to them—this perspective generally assumes that the witch

himself is a relatively impartial third party solicited by the envious actor for the purpose of causing supernatural harm.

Miguel Davila, now a keen Evangelical who operates a modestly successful *pulpería*,¹⁰⁹ recounted to me how he had personally been affected by a witchcraft attack. In fact, it was the trauma of this attack which, as he told it, led to his conversion to Pentecostalism. He told how he had once been responsible for the operation of a shop operated in the village by PRODECOOP, and had been granted a considerable sum of money to invest in stock for the business. On one occasion, he was readying himself for a trip to Condega in order to purchase supplies for the shop, and had carefully secured 10,000 *córdobas* in his pocket, ready for the journey. Just as he was about to leave the house, his son shouted out that he'd spotted some money floating in their watering can, and picked out the sopping wet notes. It turned out to be 1,500 *córdobas*. Miguel recalled how his wife had suggested that it was probably just that the money had fallen in by mistake, but that he knew that this could not have been the case. He had been extremely careful to ensure the money was carefully stowed in his pocket, fully conscious of the responsibility involved in carrying such large sums of PRODECOOP's resources. Somehow the money had—impossibly—been made to come loose from his pocket.

Another incident a few days later compounded Miguel's suspicions. He and his wife were both in bed asleep when he was suddenly woken with a shock at around midnight; the hour when, he explained, the devil himself frequently roams free. Turning on the light, Miguel found that he had in fact been woken by sand that had fallen down onto his face. He knew that there was no sand stored on his roof, and with no explanation for what had happened he lay in bed terrified, waiting for the

¹⁰⁹ *Pulperías* are small family-run shops generally operated from residential premises. Cf. Babb (2002) for an argument that such businesses typify the neoliberal period in Nicaragua, facilitated by policies aimed at cultivating individual entrepreneurship, and very frequently failing miserably to provide an adequate income for proprietors. See Figure 3.

morning to come. The whole of the following week he remained gripped by a feeling of intense fear.

This unfortunate series of events culminated when, returning home from working not long afterwards, he found a whole load of banknotes strewn across the floor of his shop. It turned out to be the shop's entire stock of cash, which had been locked up safely in a box. Once again, it was clear to Miguel there was no natural explanation for how the money could have escaped from its secure storage place. It was at this point that Miguel's plight was taken up by members of *la Profecia* church, who undertook to exorcise from his house whatever evil spirit was causing this string of misfortunes. For Miguel, the aetiology of his affliction was, in retrospect, clear. The problems were the consequence of the resort of an envious neighbour to 'bad things' (*cosas malas*: i.e., witchcraft). The witch himself was only the indirect agent of the attacks, responding to the requests of the envious neighbour. But Miguel framed the agentive status of the envious attacker as being similarly removed, reading the envious action as a consequence of having been taken over by the diabolic 'contrary spirit' (*el espíritu contrario*). Framing the incident in relation to the Manichean cosmology prevailing within Evangelical discourse, envious action showed up here as the unwitting enactment of the will of the devil.

Envy as pathogen

While both of the above perspectives comprise understandings of envy's dangers that share a construction of envy as primarily *motivating* action (albeit differently realised within natural or supernatural fields of activity), there is also an important sense in which envy is capable of standing as a potent force and form of agency in its own right, leaping out into the world of its own accord, rather than merely prompting its host to act on its behalf. Such conceptions are primarily articulated in relation to the notion of *el ojo* (the eye, i.e. 'evil eye';).

It is widely assumed that any desirable creature might arouse feelings of envy in observers, and that this envy can cause a condition of profound affliction, manifest generally as illness and referred to as having *el ojo* (also, *ojeado*, ‘eyed’; the state of having the evil eye). This is particularly a danger for young babies. The delight and pleasure taken in seeing someone’s newborn can easily slip into desirous jealousy, and this envy can have directly pernicious effects on the baby itself, giving it *el ojo*. It might fall ill immediately after having had *el ojo* inflicted on it, and if no action is taken death is considered a possible consequence. In cases where a baby is understood to have received the eye from someone, efforts will be made to bring that person back to the scene, and a ritual cure is undertaken in their presence. Fearful of these possibilities, parents take precautions. Babies are given small bracelets which are considered to protect against *el ojo*, and several people told me that if at all possible parents will simply keep them indoors in their early months of life, until they are older and less vulnerable. Animals too can suffer the consequences of an envious glance, getting the eye, sickening and sometimes dying after having been seen by someone desirous of them.¹¹⁰

Some people become aware of their tendency, utterly against their own seemingly benign will and intention, to inflict this unfortunate condition on others. For example, when Rosibel visited her aunt, Doña Paula, for the first time since having given birth, Doña Paula spent a few minutes delightedly holding and playing with the baby girl, but before long, suddenly gave her back to her daughters to remove to another room. Doña Paula was worried about giving the baby *el ojo*, she said, knowing that she had done so to another baby in the past. In that previous case things had turned out well, because the parents had been able to contact her and

¹¹⁰ The account described above, of a villager’s oxen dying as a consequence of injury, appears to suggest that the death of animals prompted by sickening and wasting—i.e. by some affliction not immediately perceptible except through its effects—is more likely to be read as being caused by this direct malignance of envy, if envy is brought into an explanation. In the case of visible wounds with an obvious physical cause, envy is likely to play a role as motivator rather than direct pathogen.

she'd been able to return to their house to remedy the condition through appropriate ritual action. But it was better to be cautious. While the rituals involved in counteracting the dangers of *el ojo* vary, they are consistent—as is the case across Latin America (Foster, 1979)—in employing symbols of explicit denigration and putative contempt. Most common in Nicaragua is the simple act of spitting on a baby or young child in an effort to offset any inadvertent desire.

Envy is here constructed as a potent, dangerous force that spills out of people into their surroundings, directly causing harm. Rosibel's husband Nestor, the father of the same baby, had at the time of the visit just described very recently died. Suddenly afflicted by a stroke, he had been ill for several months before eventually succumbing to the malady. Throughout the period of his illness, Rosibel's family speculated about possible causes, and conversations always returned to the idea of envy. Nestor and Rosibel, it was agreed, had been doing conspicuously well for themselves. Nestor, a former member of The Resistance¹¹¹ had been granted a considerable parcel of land in a community in Telpaneca as part of the Charmorro government's demobilisation programme (Close, 1999; Jonakin, 1997, see also Chapter 3 above). The couple had managed to accumulate a herd of a dozen cattle, and had invested in a well-stocked *pulperia* with several fridges and a freezer. This all-too-visible success, it was clear, was the most likely cause of Nestor's misfortune.

Rather than the kinds of inadvertent damage potentially caused by envy discussed above, however, this case appeared to involve something much more sinister. Erwin, Nestor's father-in-law, had reported having found a pair of bloodied trousers left lying around near Nestor's house. It was explained to me that this was a clear indication that witchcraft, motivated by envy, was being maliciously employed. A committed member of her local Evangelical church, Rosibel had recruited the assistance of the congregation to hold constant prayer sessions aimed both at

¹¹¹ *La Resistencia*, i.e. the 'Contra'

counter-acting the witchcraft, and petitioning God for miraculous intervention to save Nestor's life. Here, envy stood as the factor which made such malice comprehensible; it is the inhuman potency of envy which prompted people to resort to satanic means of redressing their jealousy.

Living organised, better

The argument I wish to make here is that the valence of the category of envy in the field of political practice gains its imaginative force by standing as a stark inverse of the positive ideals of efficacy and productivity described in the preceding chapters. In relation to the household unit, and the prospects of participation in state and NGO 'projects', we have seen how efficacy has been understood to depend upon achieving an appropriate state of incorporation and participation with diverse and differing sources of potency and potential. In the case of understandings of domesticity, this dynamic revolved around constructs of masculinity and femininity as in each case comprising volatile forces, ever liable to destructive excess. In the field of political action seeking to realise the benefits attributed to 'being organised', we saw how the transformative potentials attributed to powerful outside actors were taken to require the vigorous work of solicitation in order to bind their vital capacity to 'help' into local projects. In each case, the possibility and viability of action and productivity depended not on internal capacities, but rather on the prospect of properly establishing required mutualities and complementary involvements.

In each of these cases, moreover, it has already been seen how experienced volatility and forms of precariousness emerged from these stipulated requirements for productive living, and took particular shape in relation to the way different elements understood to require the work of incorporation *resisted* that imperative. Domesticity stands as problematic because the posited incorporations it requires are resisted by the inherently excessive qualities attributed to both masculinity and femininity. The benefits of being organised, we have seen, may fail to be realised

because the mediating action of '*gestionando*' can be inadequate, such that involvement with and participation in distant power fails to be attained.

It is in relation to these stipulated requirements of efficacy—and the possibilities of failure to which they give rise—that envy's role is best understood. Envy operates as the stark inverse of the reconciliations, mediations and incorporations posited as preconditions for efficacy and productivity. In a world of action within which efficacy depends upon establishing forms of mutuality across divides of gender and geography, and across categorical separations of different kinds, the work of envy shows up as the malign work of dis-incorporation, the antithesis of required forms of participation; its fearful quality emerges from the extent to which it works as the inverse of stipulations for proper and productive living. Just as the abject status of the wandering madman described in the vignette which opened this chapter achieved its horrifying fascination for Gualiqueme residents by means of being dramatically removed from the daily exchanges and ties which underwrite human sociality—the madman slept in the wild, woke in the night, avoided human interaction except, presumably, to occasionally kill, dramatizing an inversion of appropriate human behaviour—so envy is best viewed as manifesting a dramatic inversion of the positive ideals of efficacy described in the preceding chapters.

Viewing envy's dangers in this way alerts us to the ways in which quotidian efforts to establish appropriate social ties come to be viewed, concomitantly, as its best antidote. The case study presented here, I suggest, allows us to perceive the extent to which distributive political forms—the manifold 'projects' described in Chapter 6—have become bound up, for Gualiqueme residents, with everyday efforts to extend productive social ties to envisaged centres of political power. When such efforts are perceived to fail, envy is the primary conceptual resource employed to account for that failure. But this tremendous emphasis of envy's dangers by no means works to simply inhibit collective endeavours. Rather, we shall see that with

the productive possibilities of being organised taken to be inhibited by envy, this local movement works not to dissociate itself from organisation generally, but to ‘live organised’ better.

A meeting with the mayor

Everyone was packed into the small front room of don Mateo, seated on stacking plastic chairs, squashed along narrow plank benches, or standing pressed against the walls. Benito, the mayor of Condega, sat at the front of the meeting alongside several members of the FSLN who had come down from the nearby city of Estelí. They had been informed about the activities of a group in the village of Gualiqueme who, despite living within the municipality of Condega, had been making efforts to register to vote in the adjacent district of Telpaneca. They were all present in their capacity as militants of the FSLN, they insisted. Both Condega and Telpaneca had Sandinista mayors, and Gualiqueme had always been a loyally-Sandinista community. Why were people shifting their political allegiances? They just wanted to find out what the problem was, the visiting officials insisted. There was no question of recrimination or punishment—they just want to know the facts. Why were people unhappy with being in Condega?

People present in the meeting, almost all members of the group that had registered in Telpaneca, took turns to voice their complaints. First, doña Fernanda stood up and told the visitors how her husband had died in combat defending the village during the war. He had been a *socio* of the cooperative, and she too was a *socia*, she explained. When they had first come, as founding cooperative members, the war was hard, and life was hard. They had suffered hunger in those days, she lamented, but despite all that, despite all they had been through, she hadn’t received any *zinc* from the government as part of *Plan Techo*, nor had she been benefited (*beneficiado*) with the *Bono Productivo*. Her daughter was living here with plastic for a roof, she complained.

Next, Samuel Barreda took the floor. His father, he told the visitors, had been a ‘historic collaborator’¹¹² with the Sandinista guerrillas. He had been committed to the cause, and eventually died helping the revolution so that something better could come for the country. But now, he said, he too was living here with nothing but plastic to keep the rain away. We’re not taken into account (*tomado en cuenta*), he complained. The other day, he said, there were elections for the Citizens Power Council,¹¹³ and we didn’t even hear anything about it until afterwards! We don’t get invited to meetings, and nothing at all comes our way! Another contribution from don Romeo stressed that despite having served in the army for four years, he had received nothing. He had previously lived in Telpaneca, he explained, and he got nothing there. Then when he came here he got nothing either—no land, no corrugated roofing, nothing. So now he was registering with Telpaneca again to try his luck once more.

The visiting politicians listened to these complaints, and a number of related accusations; that the cooperative leadership just keeps all the benefits of these state projects for themselves, that the proceeds of the cooperative’s commercial pine forest are not shared out fairly, that the cooperative leadership denies people permission to fell trees when they need them to repair or improve their houses. But the theme that kept coming up again and again was this idea that despite all their sacrifices in the war, people were living in poverty, in particular living without sufficient roofing because they had been prevented from receiving *Plan Techo*. Each of the contributor’s assertions of eligibility to, and exclusion from, state distributions of benefits revolved around the sense that an entitlement conferred by the suffering of

¹¹² Historic collaborator (*colaborador histórico*) is an official status within the FSLN, and many villagers retain documentation verifying formal recognition of this status.

¹¹³ He used the term ‘CPC’, which referred to the *Consejos del Poder Ciudadano*. However, by this point in time CPCs had officially been replaced by a new community organisation named Cabinets of Family, Health and Life (*Gabinetes de la Familia, Salud y Vida*). People in the village generally perceived this to be the same organisation with a different name, and more often than not continued to refer to it as a CPC during the time of my research.

revolutionary participation and political service had been unjustly denied them—and this sense of obstructed entitlement was overwhelmingly focused on Ortega's flagship social projects; the *Plan Techo*, and the *Bono Productivo*. And the change of electoral registration, they explained, they hoped would solve these problems. The mayor in Condega didn't seem to be willing or able to ensure they got what they deserved. But the mayoress in Telpaneca had appeared to promise the possibility of becoming full recipients of the benefits Ortega was seen to have promised them.

The emergence of the 'Telpaneca group' and the ideal of assistance

The group which had provoked this meeting emerged gradually in Gualiqueme, developing out of the activities of a few individuals, and growing to be a substantial political force within the village by the time of the period of research. Initially, a few residents had established ties with the Telpaneca mayoralty in an effort to secure state pensions, which they considered themselves to be entitled to in recognition of their military service and political participation. Having heard that pensions might be more forthcoming from the Telpaneca municipal authorities, and prompted by officials within the local government there, they began to investigate the possibility of changing their electoral registration. Their activities happened to coincide with an upcoming local election, in which the incumbent mayoress of Telpaneca—known by residents as doña Paula—was contesting a post that was considerably less securely in the hands of the Sandinistas than was the case of the mayor in Condega. Courting the potential additional political support offered by the group, the mayoress was receptive to their requests for assistance, and also made suggestions that were the group to change their electoral registration, there might be the possibility of benefiting from future rounds of *Plan Techo*.

Indeed, accounts of members of the Telpaneca group focus primarily on the exemplary willingness of doña Paula to 'help' (*ayudar*) people. We saw in Chapter 3

how local understandings of the history of Gualiqueme and the emergence of a social pact with the FSLN were crucially bound up with notions of assistance. Here, such characterisations tied evaluations of the mayoress' behaviour into a key quality informing wider political analyses; the key difference between the Sandinistas in general, and the opposition parties (referred to generically as 'Liberals'), are captured in local accounts in relation to this ideal of help.



Figure 24—A meeting held by members of the Telpaneca group

Often this kind of 'help' came in the form of politically-inflected gifts. Periodically, members of the FSLN would arrive in the village on national holidays to give away children's toys, sweets, or small 'parcels' (*paquetes*) of household staples such as oil, rice and sugar. To celebrate the national Children's Day, for example, villagers were provided, via connections with the FSLN's municipal structures, with *piñatas*; paper figures filled with sweets which form the centrepiece of children's

parties, but lie beyond the financial means of most rural people.¹¹⁴ Schoolchildren were regularly provided with free rucksacks and shoes, which teachers distributed to lists of registered pupils. The FSLN evidently recognised and sought to exploit politically the potent local valuation of modest *ayudas* of this kind.¹¹⁵

It was evident that the overwhelmingly supportive commentaries I heard of Ortega's flagship projects such as *Plan Techo* and the *Bono Productivo* (in relation to the projects on a national scale, rather than in reference to the specific details of local implementation), primarily framed the value of such interventions in relation to a vocabulary of *ayuda*. Ortega's personal support of the interests of the poor was viewed as evident in such projects, which were taken as obviously constituting help of an appropriate kind.

In the polarised political discourse prevailing in the village, however, such positive evaluations of political comportment were framed against negative accounts of the *absence* of assistance.¹¹⁶ Villagers often commented that during the years of 'Liberal' governments—referring to the successive administrations of Chamorro, Alemán and Bolañas between 1990 and 2006—there was no such 'help' available. Having just returned with her children from a *piñata* provided by the local party to mark Children's Day (*el día del niño*), Franesca commented to me bitterly that not once had the Liberal governments provided the things needed to put on that kind of

¹¹⁴ The purchase of both *piñata* and sweets also formed part of national government economic stimulus strategies, with large orders being placed in a putative effort to vitalise local economies.

¹¹⁵ The effort to cultivate and benefit politically from such sentiments is hardly confined to the FSLN. On a national scale, social and infrastructural projects that have been undertaken by each of the successive governments of the previous decades have invariably been accompanied by a distinctive form of noticeboard proclaiming which political party or president claims responsibility for the work, along with details about the exact amount spent. Roadsides throughout Nicaragua are cluttered with such announcements, and no school or health centre is without one. When the bridge connecting Gualiqueme and several other villages by road to the town of Condega was washed away by the annual rains in 2011, the mayorality organised a provisional and improvised replacement, with diggers pushing earth up to allow vehicles to pass. A sign announcing the cost of the work and attributing it to the FSLN was in place before the diggers had left the site.

¹¹⁶ For a fascinating analysis of the historical emergence and institutional correlates of Manichean political discourse in Nicaragua, see Cruz (2005).

event. That these kinds of gift and assistance were never made was widely taken to illustrate, in this loyally-Sandinista community, the extent to which 'the Liberals' were exclusively oriented towards helping the rich, at the expense of the poor. As we saw in the comments made during the meeting just described however, despite this broad sense that the Sandinistas embodied desirable forms of 'help', it was by no means the case that this help was understood to be flowing properly from centres of political power to particular individuals in Gualiqueme itself.

Amid such expectations and evaluations, doña Paula's receptiveness to the solicitations of the early members of the Telpaneca group stood for villagers as exemplary of proper political behaviour. Esperanza, explaining her own motives for shifting away from Condega, stated that the mayor there had never helped her whatsoever, that he had never done anything, but already after having been registered in Telpaneca for just a short time, she had been assisted with a gift (*regalo*) of 1600 *córdobas* from doña Paula. Maritza too explained to me how she had visited Telpaneca to seek assistance from mayoress Paula. She recounted favourably how the mayoress had willingly provided her with enough money for the bus home and said that she would consider her request for more substantial help.

This reputation of doña Paula as fulfilling key political ideals, and the municipality of Telpaneca generally being more abundant with the possibilities of proper political engagement of this sort, led the initial group which had formed around the issue of military pensions to become attractive to others in Gualiqueme. They received increasing numbers of requests from other residents of the village to join them, and their numbers soon grew to nearly eighty people. As founding members of the group tell it, the motivation of newer members was overwhelmingly related to the perceived possibility of coming to stand as beneficiaries of projects such as the *Plan Techo*. My discussions with participants made clear that this focus was underpinned by the idea that the appropriate role of a politician should be to provide proper assistance, or 'help'. And for a period of time, doña Paula appeared to

be the embodiment of the receptive political elite. In order to understand the potency of doña Paula's image as a properly *helpful* politician, it will be useful to explore the specific disquiets and complaints of one of the founding members and leaders of the Telpaneca group, Rogelio.

Rogelio

Rogelio had been ejected from membership of the Rigoberto Cruz cooperative many years previously. As he recounts the events which led to his expulsion, he had been entrusted with the delivery of cooperative funds to the bank, but had been robbed. He was, he insisted, unjustly accused of corruption, of having simply stolen the cash, and he lost his membership as punishment; his daughter too was stripped of her membership because of the same incident, since her right to be a member had come through his own position within the cooperative (see Chapter 4, which describes the somewhat controversial ways in which cooperative entitlements have been extended to children of *socios*).¹¹⁷ Since then, he said, he has been 'nothing' within the community, left out of considerations regarding social projects of all kinds. His analysis of his own situation tied into a detailed critique of what he took to be a corrupt local leadership. The idea, he insisted, was that Ortega's social projects should help everyone. But here in Gualiqueme, all the members of the *directiva* are just out to look after their own interests. They are motivated by 'pure envy' (*pura envidia*), and prevent anyone else from qualifying for assistance.

If only I could get through to the president, Rogelio insisted, all these problems would be sorted out! He told me how he had once been given a phone number,

¹¹⁷ Other residents of the community are sceptical of these assertions, and assume that Rogelio did indeed steal the money. Some accounts present his original defence in the face of the allegations as having been the assertion that he was robbed by a 'monkey'; a claim that relies upon assumptions about the possibilities of nefarious spiritual practices and witchcraft. It is widely assumed that those versed in the dark arts are capable of effecting bodily transformations, assuming the form of animals for mischievous purposes.

apparently for the presidential offices, and that he had tried several times to make a call to the president himself. But he had never managed to get through. The line went dead, or no-one picked up, and it was too expensive to just keep on trying... *I've been a Sandinista all my life*, he argued. *If the president were to find out what has gone on here, he would sort this mess out straight away!*

We can see how the tenor of Rogelio's complaints emerges precisely from the extent to which the ideals of efficacy described in previous chapters are perceived to be obstructed by the work of envious action. The fundamental distance inhering between constituents and presidential power—a distance which the vignette which opened this thesis dramatized—is construed by Rogelio as requiring a critical mediation. The easy access to distributive state benefits, or the benefits of 'being organised', would indicate the adequate resolution of this mediation. But given that this easy flow was not evident, Rogelio infers an obstructive force through reference to envy. The malign work of 'pure envy', Rogelio makes clear, is destructive primarily to the extent that it stands in the way of this desired mediation of distance, serving to cut he and other aggrieved Gualiqueme residents off from the possibility of participation in the transformative political potentials attributed to presidential power.

Rogelio was very keen to distinguish his complaints about his plight within the cooperative from any implication that they might connote dissatisfaction with the incumbent Sandinista government. Any such 'disloyalty' could hardly be suspected. Rogelio very frequently wore the distinctive pink FSLN t-shirts he had received when attending Sandinista rallies, and the walls of his house were plastered with Sandinista party posters, mostly featuring images of Ortega.¹¹⁸ On one occasion he showed me a scrap book he had kept over the course of his life, filled with

¹¹⁸ See Kampwith (2010b), which includes an account of the shifts in style and design in FSLN communications and campaign materials in recent years under the influence of first lady Rosario Murillo, involving the adoption of vivid pink as colour of choice.

mementos, a few personal and family photos, and newspaper clippings. Prominently featuring in the collection, alongside documents certifying his own involvement with and membership of the FSLN over the years, were large newspaper photos of Ortega himself, carefully torn out and displayed alongside the more obviously personal material.



Figure 25—A Gualaqueme resident, Rogelio, displays his personal scrapbook, with a newspaper image of Ortega preserved alongside family photos.

Ortega was evidently helping the people, Rogelio insisted. Projects like *Plan Techo* and the *Bono Productivo* were helping the poor. Indeed, these projects constituted the focal point of Rogelio's evaluative contrast between Ortega's recent period as president and the earlier phase of 'Liberal' governments¹¹⁹ who—in accordance with the standard Sandinista evaluation—'didn't help at all'. It's not that the help isn't there, he explained. The problem is that the *directiva* of the cooperative is 'envious' (*envidiosa*), it works to exclude people from the benefits they deserve.

¹¹⁹ I.e., the successive administrations of Chamorro, Alemán and Bolañas between 1990 and 2006.

The help and assistance that Ortega was intending to be generally available to the poor was being obstructed in its proper flow by these corrupt local leaders—the *directiva* of the cooperative, the leadership of the Council of Citizen Power—and directed exclusively towards their friends and family. Such problems could hardly be blamed on the national government, he argued, it was entirely due to the envy and malice of local leaders.

As is clear from his thwarted aspiration to phone the president personally, Rogelio was clear that he viewed the best possibility of resolution for his own problems—his exclusion from the cooperative, the fact that he hadn't received *Plan Techo* or the *Bono Productivo*—as being some kind of direct contact with Ortega himself. The set of assumptions underpinning this vision of direct presidential contact appear to me to have considerable local purchase, and indeed to comprise a central conceptual foundation of the Telpaneca group's mobilisation. The clear implication of Rogelio's ideas is that the basis of proper political relations is there as a potential, guaranteed by the leadership of Ortega whose ultimate position underpinning powerful forms of political 'help' is without question. The problem is not eliciting help, it is establishing oneself in a proper relation to this ready source of potential assistance given the dangers of malign *obstruction* presented by the 'envious' orientations of nearby others. The central question for members of the Telpaneca group, in the light of this perceived obstruction in the flow of valued assistance, becomes how best to re-establish contact and create the proper conditions of mutual involvement with central political power.

Elaborating further on his sense of the failures and corruptions of local leadership, he made clear that he considered the problem to lie in their failure to perform '*gestion*' as they properly should do. As described in Chapter 6, this idea of a *gestión* refers to an act of political solicitation, whereby a representative requests and facilitates assistance from outside authorities on behalf of their community, or particular people within it. The point of being organised in a cooperative, or a

Citizen's Power Council, he insisted, was to facilitate proper *gestiones*; by being organised, a group empowered a leader to make *gestiones* on their behalf. Having leaders effectively performing this function of actively soliciting and courting assistance was crucial; without leaders doing appropriate *gestiones*, the benefits properly intended to flow from the heights of political power—from Ortega himself—down to the people, wouldn't take their intended path. And the situation he found himself in within Gualiqueme he attributed primarily to this blockage; rather than performing proper *gestiones* that would benefit everyone, leaders were enviously amassing the privileges of personal connections with political structures. Crucial intermediaries between distinct levels of political power were not, he insisted, performing their intended function. His own sense of exclusion from 'help', of not being 'taken into account' (*tomado en cuenta*) in forms of distributive assistance such as *Plan Techo*, stood as the most palpable evidence of this separation.

Rogelio's ideas here capture a crucial political anxiety, and one that was shared among participants in the Telpaneca group. His thinking describes a context where proper *flows* of assistance are viewed as providing a key indicator of right relations with a political power envisaged as distant, tenuously accessible, and yet ultimately underpinning the possibilities of advancement. Involvement among Gualiqueme residents with the Telpaneca group, I suggest, revolved around this political imaginary; they responded to the possibility the group's activities appeared to offer of overcoming what was taken to be a key obstacle in resolving problems of access and assistance that emerge from this imaginary. Envy plays a particular role here. The envious actors in Rogelio's account achieve their malignant effects primarily by making people ineligible for state distributions. The local resonance of these concerns, which led to this group gaining such a substantial following, indicates the extent to which the figure of doña Paula appeared, for a time, to offer the possibility of overcoming this envious obstruction, this problem of envy as

obstacle to involvement with flows of presidential power via the distributions of, for example, *Plan Techo*.

A new Gabinete de la Familia, Salud y Vida

With envy understood to prompt existing local leaders and intermediaries to be actively preventing members of the Telpaneca group from participating in the distributive benefits of being organised, they specifically aimed through their activities to take control of the process of *gestionando*, establishing their own replacements for existing intermediaries; intermediaries construed as having been compelled by envy to prevent the political mediations which they rightly should have been serving to facilitate. This priority was made clear in a meeting held by the group in Gualiqueme. With membership having reached a certain critical mass, it was decided by authorities within the municipal government in Telpaneca that, given the number of newly-registered citizens resident in Gualiqueme, they would need to establish a *Gabinete de la Familia, Salud y Vida* of their own. Due to the relatively small number of people the new organisation would represent in comparison with most village *Gabinetes*, it was suggested that Gualiqueme residents jointly form a *Gabinete* with residents of the adjacent community of El Jocote. The date of a meeting in which elections for the ten administrative posts would be held was set, and it was arranged that a representative of the municipal government in Telpaneca would come to oversee the selection process.

The day prior to this minor election, leaders of the Telpaneca group in Gualiqueme called a meeting of their own in order to prepare their members. It was necessary, argued don Lucas, one of the founding members of the group, to think carefully about how they were going to vote, and to come up with a plan of action. Numerically, he explained, they were outnumbered by the people in El Jocote. If they didn't coordinate their actions, they might end up with a *Gabinete* entirely filled with people from the other community. And then they'd find themselves in exactly the

same situation they were in already in Gualiqueme. All the benefits of being organised in a *Gabinete* would go to people there, he stated, and none would come to them. Throughout the meeting, don Lucas' discussion made clear what he considered to be at stake; ensuring they got their proper place in the *Gabinete*, he argued, would ensure that they were well positioned to be in line for coming distributions of *Plan Techo*. You've got to organise yourself well (*hay que organizarse bien*) to get these kinds of projects, he insisted. The whole point of a *Gabinete*, he explained, was to conduct *gestiones* for this kind of project—and if they had no influence in this key structure of local governance, they wouldn't be able to direct the *gestiones* in their own favour. The crucial thing at the election meeting the following day would be turnout, he argued. If no-one bothered to come, El Jocote would dominate the proceedings and Gualiqueme would be left out. Just as existing flows of assistance were diverted by envious locals, the perceived threat was clear that unless they properly realised the ideal of being organised, others equally separate from their own involvements and concerns would comparably inhibit the realisation of proper *gestiones*. The group had to organise well to take direct control of the mediatory function of *gestionando*, and eliminate the possibility of envious obstruction.

By the end of the period of research, the group's activities were still nascent, but as they saw it they had indeed already realised a number of successful *gestiones*, bringing the benefits of projects to members of their group within the village via their connections with the Telpaneca mayoralty. The possibility, however, that the group had found itself courted by politicians primarily because of the strategic possibilities their votes offered in the 2011 elections was not lost on some members. As discussed above, prior to the elections members spoke warmly about how the mayoress had been extremely personable and receptive to requests for assistance. As the elections passed however, it seemed that increasingly people were coming to feel disillusioned with the extent to which this kind of attentiveness and generosity had dissipated. For a brief time, the *alcaldesa* had appeared to behave exactly as powerful

politicians *should* behave. She was responsive to *gestiones*, and efforts to bring needs (*necesidades*) to her attention generally resulted in some kind of assistance, however modest. And she appeared to hold out the promise of providing a focal point for *gestiones* which could result in inclusion within Ortega's key social programs—and crucially, provide a means of bypassing a local leadership viewed as exerting an 'envious' stranglehold on existing distributive channels. But increasingly, members of the group described their impression that *gestiones* aimed in her direction were, most recently, seeming to fall upon deaf ears. I want to focus here, though, on the aspirations articulated by the group, the anxieties such ambitions aimed to overcome, and way the material flows of distributive projects became tied into these concerns. By deploying the idiom of envy, I suggest, members of the Telpaneca group worked to construe the distributive components of political projects as equivalent to the ongoing exchanges understood to underpin social life.

Political syncretism

The activities of this group can perhaps best be understood as an example of political syncretism, in which the explicit ideals advocated by Sandinista politics have been 'vernacularised' (Michelutti, 2008) through accommodation to a potent set of local assumptions about how best to ensure a productive social life, and how to establish proper relations with power. The priority of 'being organised', a key Sandinista ideal, is here enacted among a population who conceptualise power and political agency in a way quite distinct from the traditions of political thought from which this ideal originated. While Sandinista theory, as discussed above, draws on socialist traditions of thought to envisage 'being organised' as primarily having to do with establishing horizontal ties and solidarities, Gualiqueme residents have been seen to be primarily concerned with how to best establish forms of mutuality which span distances of different kinds. Casting discontent with the distributive flows integral to assistentialist politics in terms of envy, I suggest, works to identify the material

distributions of state and NGO projects with the broader range of everyday exchanges and flows which are understood to shore up the forms of positive sociality to which envy is paradigmatically opposed. By establishing this identification, a quotidian ethics of mutuality is extended to the heights of political power; in other words, for members of the Telpaneca group, to the president himself.

It is for this reason that such emphasis was placed by members of the Telpaneca group, as with other Gualiqueme residents, upon the material components of Ortega's social projects. Standing as a recipient of the roofing panels of *Plan Techo*, for example, can be thought of as offering rural Nicaraguans the prospect of establishing a crucial form of mutuality with one of the most potent sources of 'help' available; the president himself. And it is because accomplishing an appropriate state of social involvement and mutuality with exterior political power is what was at stake, I argue, that the idiom of envy is the first recourse of those who feel that their prospects for achieving this involvement have been threatened. In order to develop these points, I turn now to a brief exploration of the way minor gift exchanges infuse efforts to realise beneficial social involvements, and to the harsh judgements conventionally applied to those who are held to eschew these everyday forms of mutual participation.

The everyday performance of mutuality

The role of petty gifts and the continual exchange of resources between households in Central America has frequently been analysed in terms of the survival strategies of economically-precarious populations. In the case of Nicaragua, Lancaster (1992, p56) argues that the continued functioning of a 'traditional gift economy' among his urban informants works to redistribute surpluses between households such that 'social security' can be guaranteed 'without actually expanding production'. Nygren and Myatt-Hirvonen (2009), comparably, argue that exchanges between households in Honduras are best understood as comprising primarily an informal social safety

net, one among a portfolio of strategies deployed to cope with extreme poverty. While these economic perspectives which stress structural marginality undoubtedly capture a crucial aspect of these forms of exchange, it will be suggested here that in making sense of the concerns of the Telpaneca group, they are best viewed in the light of local assumptions about how properly productive social relations may be maintained. Indeed, Lancaster (1992, p57) also observes that the potency of this kind of gift emerges from its capacity to function as 'a medium for cementing social relations. The power it carries is the power to compel reciprocity; that is, it bears a moral and ethical imperative.' It is this aspect of the continual material flow between rural households, I suggest, which resonates with the political concerns of the Telpaneca group to ensure an adequate relation with the president.

Visitors to a house in Gualqueme will almost always, except in dire economic circumstances when resources don't allow, be presented upon departure with a gift of some kind to take away with them, depending on what is seasonally available, or what the household happens to have in plentiful supply. Over the course of research, I would occasionally make a return gift in order to repay a felt indebtedness after having been sent off with a bunch of bananas or a bag full of lemons on a previous visit. Almost invariably I would then be immediately presented with a further gift of some kind, and my efforts to cancel out the sense of indebtedness were swiftly thwarted.¹²⁰ Between households—and owing in part to the extent to which a woman's labours require her to remain within her own house—it is frequently young children who are the messengers of such gifts, serving to maintain flows between households as they are sent on continual trips to deliver a pound of coffee here, a small bag of rice there, a portion of soup or a few *tamales*. Such flows are hardly a straightforward or direct response to pressing economic need, although such considerations sometimes inform gifts. When Wilfredo and Nubia were struggling

¹²⁰ Recalling Bourdieu's (1977) classic statement regarding the constitutive temporal component of gift exchange should have alerted me to the inappropriateness of attempting to reciprocate so soon.

economically after a poor harvest, badly hit by coffee rust and facing the upcoming prospect of considerable ritual expense owing to the upcoming anniversary of a son's death, my host Esperanza ensured that she invited Wilfredo to eat whenever she could. She stated clearly that she hoped to help him with his financial troubles by means of these gifts of food. But she also recruited me to deliver small bags of rice to a family considerably better off than herself, who had purchased land within the cooperative's title in order to establish a profitable salad farm. Although hardly wealthy, that family had no pressing need for a ten *cordoba* bag of rice, but such gifts were duly received. This kind of exchange stands as a paradigmatic form of positive social interaction, and the perennial flow of visitors in and out of houses across the village—along with the ceaseless visiting of young children sent on errands (*mandados*)—were in the constant process of facilitating and ferrying such minor flows and exchanges between households. The centrality of these minor exchanges to positive views of sociality is made clear by the extent to which ethical condemnation is directed to those perceived to avoid them, judgements to which I now turn.

Stinginess and pride

The normative quality of this quotidian effort to establish involvements between households with a continual flow of mutually-imbricating exchanges is accompanied and reinforced by a number of key ethical motifs. Of particular relevance is the potently negative valuation attached to being 'stingy' (*pinche*), which is clearly associated with a reluctance to engage in these crucial exchanges (cf., Lancaster, 1992). Indeed, being stingy is one of the primary epithets available for casting aspersions on someone's character, and everyday gossip in Gualiqueme frequently centred on reputed acts of extreme and shocking stinginess.

One characteristic account of exemplary stinginess in Gualiqueme recounted the behaviour of a wealthy local man. His sons had sufficient money available to them to drive around in cars, and he owned a substantial herd of cattle and operated

a successful cheese (*cuajada*) business. Despite this wealth, all he took with him to eat when he went to work was a few tortillas and a pinch of salt. The narrator of the story commented with derision that to this old miser, an old, tatty pair of boots—he indicated just such a pair that he had stored away in a sack after many years of use—would appear as if they were brand new.

Other stories of stinginess I heard frequently revolved around a particular villager, don Juan, whose coffee parcels within the cooperative were relatively large and lucrative. Despite having a decent income from his coffee, the stories went, his family drank their own coffee bitter (*amargo*, i.e., without sugar). One tale described a time when don Juan had been returning from town having sold a significant quantity of coffee, and was carrying 90,000 *córdobas* in his pocket. Despite this substantial amount of cash, it was said, he chose not to take the bus back to the village in order to save a few *córdobas*. A neighbour who saw him starting his journey on foot called out to ask why he was walking. Don Juan stated simply that he didn't have the money for the bus, so he was travelling on foot, at which point his neighbour said 'here, take this 50 pesos and catch the bus!', a gift exemplifying the kind of generosity judgements of stinginess implicitly promote, and one which don Juan outrageously accepted, despite all the money in his pocket. The ambiguity of these stories was highlighted by another account which asserted that don Juan's wife had once inadvertently burned 15,000 *córdobas* while tidying the house. Not realising that her husband had secretively squirrelled away the cash, hoping even to keep it hidden away from the claims of his own family, she reportedly swept up what she thought were just old papers along with the rest of the rubbish as she was cleaning. While some stories of stinginess may imply that wealth comes as a product of the evasion of mutual involvements, this particular story carries the strong implication that catastrophic loss can come from refusing such involvements.

The productive possibilities of resolutely unstingy behaviour were suggested by one account of false stinginess. I was discussing the impact of the 2012 coffee rust

epidemic (see Chapter 2) with doña Esperanza, whose Evangelical convictions frequently informed her commentaries. She observed to me that one particular resident of Gualiqueme, don Guillermo, appeared to have been almost entirely unaffected by the blight, while other villagers had suffered devastating drops in production. Her interpretation of this disparity was striking. Don Guillermo had strategically cultivated a public image as being stingy, she speculated. But evidently he had been secretly paying his *diezmo* (tithe) with generosity to the church, and it was that covert contribution which secured him God's protection, when the majority—most of whom *really were* too stingy to pay up—had been receiving punishment (*castigo*). The rest of us give to each other, she stated—observing how she would always give something to a visitor if she had something to—but we forget to give to God!

Stinginess is often associated with the equally-dubious quality of being 'proud' (*fachenta*). The condemnation involved in accusations of being *fachenta* similarly revolves around the idea of non-involvement and social disembodiedness; the paradigmatic example of which stands as those who fail to reciprocally respond to the conventional 'adios' when passing in the street. Such individuals, symbolically holding themselves apart, are assumed to arrogantly consider themselves too good to stoop to communicative engagement with their snubbed potential interlocutor. Wilber and Roger, for example, made a typical reference to pride when complaining about their own perceived exclusion from the benefits of being organised obtained by the members of the Telpaneca group through their successful *gestion*es with the mayoress. *Those people*, Wilber stated, *when they need your help for some reason, they come looking for you. But at other times, they pass in the street without even looking, all fachenta!* Interestingly, their critique of the Telpaneca group thus mirrored that deployed by the Telpaneca group themselves in relation to the Rigoberto Cruz *directiva*.

In both the ethics of everyday exchange between households, and in judgements of stinginess and pride which condemn its shirking or avoidance, a positive ideal of incorporation into and participation in the projects and concerns of others is cultivated. Material flows and beneficial social involvements are understood to be coterminous and co-constructing, and gifts serve to both reveal and establish valued social ties. The political complaints of the Telpaneca group described above, with their emphasis of the material components of Ortega's distributive political projects, can be viewed as working to realise this positive vision of productive sociality in the broader political domain.

Presidential incorporation

This everyday economy of reciprocal gifting can be viewed as the ongoing performance of the forms of appropriate mutuality and co-dependency posited as crucial for productive social existence. Ideas about envy, stinginess and pride, it can be seen, all contribute towards a normative ethics of involvement, one which is understood to be established through mutual exchanges and minor material flows. This amounts to the assertion that productivity requires *participation* in the potentials of others. The ongoing flow of gifts establishes an involvement with neighbours—and by extension, with politicians, or other powerful individuals—within which complementary agentive potentials are appropriately contained and productively directed, and the destructive and malign quality of uncontained and dis-incorporated human potencies staved off. It is in relation to these ideas and ideals, we can conclude, that the resonant local purchase of the distributive political styles prevailing in Nicaragua's current 'assistentialist' dynamic of governance takes hold.

From the perspective of this analysis, the complaints of the Telpaneca group appear as efforts to guarantee their ongoing ability to incorporate presidential power within their everyday networks of contained agentive potential. As Rogelio's images

of corrupt intermediaries make clear, the group's anxieties have to do with the proper connection, the proper flow of communication, involvement and incorporation understood to be taking place between the village and the heights of political power, particularly having to do with the imagined relationship with the president himself. And consistent with the suggestion that envy stands as the negation of productivity, the epitome of enviousness in the group's complaints consisted of obstructing access to the material flows which offered the prospect of establishing these productive incorporations of presidential power through the performance of dependence. The threat posed by such perceptions of envious obstruction must be understood in terms of this ideology of productivity in which material flows play a crucial role in attaining forms of mutuality and incorporation, then, not purely in material terms of the value of the object or benefit in question.

While Ortega's distributive projects did indeed involve relatively valuable material flows, almost as pertinent and commented-upon among residents of Gualiqueme were the occasional distributions of school backpacks by the cooperative PRODECOOP. Such distributions were a significant focus of attention when evaluating the organisation, despite amounting to a rather negligible value economically, and comprising a cost that was in fact paid for out of member's own contributions.¹²¹ Clearly, the act of distribution itself and what it implies regarding social incorporation plays a key role in the extent to which these material flows are valued, and the analysis advanced here accounts for this.

It might be suggested that the success in terms of discursive impact and popularity of Ortega's key social programs such as *Plan Techo* and the *Bono Productivo*, have to do with the way in which they enable subaltern populations to construct, through the role of material flows in the programs, the seductive

¹²¹ This by no means escaped the attention of local commentators, but knowledge of the fact didn't appear to lessen the extent to which such distributions were valued.

possibility of participation in presidential power through the imagined extension of everyday exchange relations. But the same seductive possibility has made any threat to such envisaged incorporation highly charged, and the tensions emerging out of the necessarily limited material goods associated with Ortega's social projects have been magnified accordingly. The intense local focus on efforts to stand as beneficiaries of programs such as *Plan Techo* should be understood in the light of this. And it is as a threat to this prospect that envy as a danger principally informs the critique articulated by Rogelio and the Telpaneca group.

Regarding the reciprocity of these ties, attention to the critical claims of the Telpaneca group makes clear the extent to which their contributions were constructed through the idiom of struggle, and cast temporally backwards to the years of revolution and civil war. As was seen in their meeting with the mayor, the tremendous suffering of those years is, in their formulation, cast as a prolonged contribution that *should* properly be capable of eliciting appropriate return flows, an act of sacrificial suffering establishing eligibility for return prestations (Mayblin, 2010). It has already been discussed in Chapter 4 how the notion of *derecho* draws upon an agricultural ideology of value and entitlement as founded upon the suffering of toil, the sweat and struggle of hard physical labour; and Chapter 5 explored how this ideology of labour came to be extended into the political realm through the qualities attributed to the act of performing a *gestión*. Suffering through the revolutionary years is, in these critical formulations of the Telpaneca group, a particularly potent mode of exactly this kind of sacrificial productivity, the bountiful returns of which are viewed as properly coming as a consequence of entering into mutuality with the revolutionary state. We will explore these key ideas further in Chapter 8, in which the analytical possibilities opened up by local Catholic ritual, with its integral play of sacrifice and potent material distribution will be pursued.

Conclusion: Abject separation

This chapter has explored some of the ways in which the notion of envy plays into local negotiations of a political context in which distributive acts are central and resonate potently with local practices of quotidian gift exchange. Such everyday exchanges constitute a primary means by which other actors, understood to be volatile and dangerous if unconnected to one's own projects, might be recruited, and incorporated productively into the everyday material flows constitutive of social life. The particular value attributed to involvement with the distributive elements of key social programs such as *Plan Techo* and the *Bono Productivo*, it has been shown, emerges in reference to these ideas about how to establish proper relations; and envy appears as a danger primarily to the extent that it threatens the extension of ties of involvement towards imagined centres of political power.

We saw above how existing accounts of envy have tended to frame its effects in two opposed ways. On the one hand, the notion that prevailing assumptions about envy's dangers lead to a culture of suspicion has underpinned assertions that collective or cooperative ventures are doomed to failure among populations subscribing to these anxieties. On the other hand, redistributive social mechanisms constitutive of community are viewed as having been enforced by the fear of envy. The analysis pursued in this chapter troubles both of these models. Firstly, we have seen that concerns about envy, far from simply inhibiting collective ventures, have underpinned vibrant efforts in Gualiqueme to properly realise the benefits assumed to inhere in 'being organised'. But as already established in Chapter 6, those potential benefits are envisioned in accordance with a particular model of productive political relations, one which grapples with the problem of how to secure the potent assistance of outside powers. Secondly, envy's dangers appear to emerge not in relation to objective wealth, but rather to prevailing ideals of political incorporation. While Foster's (1965, 1979) account of levelling mechanisms, for example, assumes that success is evaluated in accordance with material accumulation, such that the danger

of envy is construed as primarily levelled at better-off individuals, we have seen how Gualiqueme residents' evaluations of envy's dangers take shape in relation to prevailing assumptions regarding political efficacy. Since efficacy requires participation and involvement in the potentials of outside powers—an involvement theoretically available through the performance of *gestiones*, as shown in Chapter 6—envy shows up as principally problematic insofar as it threatens that envisaged method of establishing proper participation in, and mutuality with, distant sources of power. So while Chapter 6 showed that a notion of distance was integral to the sense of value underpinning efforts to 'live organised', that distance must remain capable of being mediated through the performance of material flows. It is *separation* from the enabling potentials of outside political powers, particularly those represented by the president himself, which appears here as the most troubling consequence of envious action. The danger of envy is the danger of disconnection, an abject separation which threatens fundamental relations of assistance which, as we have seen in Chapter 3, are viewed as foundational to the community and its course of development, and as integral to any prospect of personal advancement.

It is, we might conclude, the possibility of plausibly overcoming this threatening separation, and potentially extending the mutualities and incorporations effected by quotidian forms of gift exchange to centres of personalised political power—to the president himself—which distributive political flows are imagined to offer. However, we also saw how the complaints of the Telpaneca group described above crucially revolved around notions of struggle and sacrifice; the ready flows of assistance which envy was inferred to obstruct *should* have been facilitated by their own sufferings during the years of revolution and war. It is in order to try and properly appreciate this element of the political imaginary brought to bear upon Ortega's distributive projects that I turn in the final chapter to an analysis of La Purísima, a Catholic ritual in which the theme of sacrifice and its relation to material flows of assistance holds a central place.

Chapter 8—*La Purísima*: productivity and efficacy in Catholic distributive ritual

A concluding comparison

‘That’s why you have to organise yourself with God!’ (*por eso hay que organizarse con Dios*), asserted Esperanza, as if this statement brought our conversation to its natural conclusion. We were discussing local politics, and Esperanza had been detailing to me the various alignments of political support prevailing among her neighbours and associates in the village; who was ‘organised’ with which projects and which politicians, what benefits they had received or had been promised. But her conversation soon turned to the legal dispute that had arisen between ‘*los Revueltos*’ and the cooperative (cf. Chapter 4), and she expressed a bemused exasperation at the fact that lawyers appeared to make a living from arguments, reaping other people’s disputes for their profits from the comfort of desks. For all the struggles of villagers to realise the possibilities of being organised in different ways, being screwed over never seemed far away. That’s why you have to organise yourself with God. That is the only real security, Esperanza implied.

Esperanza’s easy slippage between religious and political domains here is striking precisely because it passed, among those listening to her dialogue, as being entirely unremarkable, appearing to stand as a natural line of association. Though ‘being organised’ in the sense discussed in the preceding chapters is on the one hand clearly a political imperative with mundane institutional correlates, Esperanza’s use of the notion here situated it as a general, broadly desirable condition of being, one capable of being realised beyond any specific institutional setting. As will be seen shortly, such slippages and explicitly noted parallels between the putatively-distinct domains of the ‘religious’ and the ‘political’ are common among residents of Gualiqueme. The fertility of the kinds of comparison invited by these domains is clearly not lost on village residents themselves.

In using elements of either of these distinct fields of practice to mutually elucidate and comment upon the other, Gualiqueme residents are of course generating knowledge in a way that parallels an intellectual strategy frequently employed by scholars of rural Latin America. Folk Catholic practices in particular have been widely analysed in a comparative framework in relation to political and institutional forms prevailing on the continent, particularly those of clientelism; but also popular mobilisations among scholars interested in resistance and the possibility of revolution. Most common have been forms of ‘false consciousness’ theorisation, which posit that the structures of Catholic ritual work to naturalise hierarchies and power inequalities in the social order, inhibiting the possibility of resistance (e.g., Greenberg, 1989). Others, however, have seen in some of the redistributive elements of Catholicism seeds of a nascent socialist consciousness (Lancaster, 1988).

That Gualiqueme residents’ creation of knowledge about their own institutions might mirror the knowledge-making strategies of scholars should perhaps not surprise us. It has been argued that the practice of comparison holds a privileged place in anthropological analysis, for example, primarily because there is a certain isomorphism between the production of anthropological knowledge, and the processes by which the object of that knowledge, e.g., ‘culture’, emerges in the first place:

‘Comparison is not just our primary analytic tool. It is also our raw material and our ultimate grounding, because what we compare are always and necessarily, in one form or other, comparisons. If culture, as Marilyn Strathern wrote, “...consists in the way people draw analogies between different domains of their worlds”, then every culture is a gigantic, multidimensional process of comparison’ (Viveiros de Castro, 2004, citation removed).

This chapter will work to think through the ways in which comparison between religious and political domains provides insight into local norms of productivity and

efficacy. It will be suggested that a number of distinct manners of conceptualising the connection between these ostensibly distinct social arenas are available, and that each offers its own form of insight. Firstly, charting indigenous acts of comparison, such as that illustrated in the vignette above, constitutes a crucial point of grounding. By observing the ways in which analogies are made to emerge locally, some of the parameters of plausible and productive comparison can be gauged; and it is only to be expected that fertile intra-contextual comparisons will have been explored already by participants. The chapter will thus begin by illustrating some of the instances in which local commentators themselves draw connections and parallels—or obfuscate any putative separation between—the domains in question.

It can also be seen—arguably as a consequence of the artificiality of the categories of ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ as distinct domains in the first place (Arnal and McCutcheon, 2012)—that there are numerous local phenomena and involvements which defy categorisation as belonging to either one of these two arenas of practice. Of particular relevance for this account are the many putatively religious organisations and institutions engaged with by villagers which operate in closely analogous ways to the more obviously ‘economic’ or ‘political’ projects that comprised a central focus of Chapters 6 and 7. Such instances can be considered to reinforce and make more compelling the kinds of indigenous comparison explored in the first section, and an account will be provided of prominent examples of such overlap encountered during the time of research.

But the ultimate aim of this chapter will be to utilise indigenous comparisons as a starting point in order to further the analysis of local norms of efficacy and productivity through a comparison of my own. With this intention I undertake an analysis of the distinctive Nicaraguan tradition of *La Purísima*. This annual season of folk Catholic ritual is replete with elements which cry out for comparative exploration in relation to the themes explored in the thesis thus far: distributive activity and material flows, performed relations of (co-)dependency, and acts of

solicitation drawing on notions of struggle and sacrifice are constitutive components of the ritual. As will be seen, the resonance of these parallels is by no means lost on local commentators, and some of the indigenous comparisons documented in the first section of the chapter will cover comparable terrain. I intend to build on these local observations in order to develop a synthesis of the model of efficacy described across the thesis. Through exploring the way the ritual can be viewed as an iteration, or configuration, of some of the key elements informing local theories of efficacy, the discussion will serve to conclude the thesis by drawing together the argument that has developed across the chapters.

Asking God organisationally

As Esperanza's insistence that being organised with God is the only viable strategy of security makes clear, Gualiqueme residents frequently employ ostensibly political images in speaking of things putatively religious, and vice versa. On one occasion, for example, I was interviewing Rogelio. He had been speaking about the fact that he had come to hold a leadership role in the local organisation which had been campaigning for military pensions, whose activities led to the formation of the Telpaneca group (as described in Chapter 7). He had been discussing the theme of organisation throughout the interview, and at one point I asked whether he considered it important to be organised. His response, as with Esperanza's comments, shifted fluidly between domains;

'It's important to be organised in every little thing, because you're not going to be helped or listened to if you're on your own, and if there's something you need or you've got a serious problem there's nothing like being organised, on your own you're nothing, if you're met together, then whatever it is they'll help you, or help, or whatever else, in all forms we're organised, even spiritually organised, in, in, in in groups, and in the material too it's good to

be organised, spiritual and material, spiritually as well its good, giving thanks to God, asking him organisationally'¹²²

Rogelio's conflation here appears to revolve around a common structure of solicitation perceived in both the making of requests for assistance to mundane political authorities—this, after all, was the whole purpose of his campaign to receive a military pension—and the act of collective worship and celebration in which divine assistance is sought. In both domains, he implies, being heard, having your requests received and recognised, and the prospect of gaining desired forms of assistance is made more likely by the state of being organised.

Drawing parallels on the basis of a common concern to request assistance was, indeed, a frequent basis for these slippages and uses of analogy. During another interview, don Lucas was explaining to me that the *Ecclesiales de Base* liberation theology group he was involved with took a different view than was traditional regarding the Catholic saints. The saints are just images (*imágenes*), he stated; they are not spiritual powers in themselves. If you make a request of an image, you're not really directing your attention to God, who is the one who might actually help you. To illustrate his point, he directed my attention to an FSLN campaign poster he had displayed on his wall, showing an image of Daniel Ortega. It's as if you wanted to direct a *gestión* to Daniel, he said, and you made your request to that poster.

¹²² My translation, original interview transcript: '*Es importante estar organizado por todo y todo, porque a uno solo no le ayuda ni escucha, o por cualquier necesidad o gravedad no hay como estar organizado, uno solo no es nada, reunidamente [sic] sí, si por cualquier cosa uno lo apoyan, o apoya, o cualquier otro, en todo aspecto estamos organizado, hasta en espiritualmente organizado, en en en, en grupos, y en lo material también es bueno estar organizado, espiritual y material, espiritualmente también es bueno... dándole gracias a Dios, pidiéndole a Dios organizadamente [sic].*'

Such comparisons and conflation can be seen to move in both directions; it is not just religious involvements which are described using models drawn from political life. On one occasion, for instance, members of the FSLN arrived in the village in a pick-up truck. Word quickly spread that they were going to be giving out ‘*paquetes*’ to villagers, small supplies of household essentials such as oil and sugar,



Figure 26— FSLN activists distribute political literature, party t-shirts, children’s toys and basic household goods in an event described by one Gualiqueme resident as a *Purísima*.

along with plastic toys for children, posters and the latest version of the distinctive pink campaign t-shirts of the FSLN. Muncho, telling me about the event, stated simply that the visiting party activists were going to be holding a *Purísima*. It wasn’t December, and there was of course no praying or singing involved in this particular distribution, so his description can hardly have been literal. But it is notable that for him, isolating the act of distributing gifts as definitive of a *Purísima* made the equivalence between the distinct distributive acts clear. As mentioned above, these visits from FSLN activists were a reasonably frequent occurrence, generally coinciding with days of national holiday such as Children’s Day. As I watched the

distribution take place from the edge of the crowd, I asked one Gualiqueme resident whether he intended to join the queue to receive one of the t-shirts, which had just started being handed out. He wouldn't bother, he said, as he already had three or four of them.

Institutional overlap

The resonance of these parallels between domains for Gualiqueme residents was reinforced, no doubt, by the extent to which local religious organisations undertook development and welfare 'projects' of closely comparable form to those discussed in Chapter 6, and, conversely, by the extent to which the material basis of religious activity was guaranteed by the performance of acts of *gestión* with municipal authorities and other sources of external funding.

These overlaps were illuminated by a series of commentaries made by Wilber. During one broad-ranging conversation, Wilber made comparable conflation between religious involvements and the notion of being organised to those discussed above. We had been discussing the appropriate way to respond to serious illness. A relative of mine had been diagnosed as terminally ill, and Wilber, aware of my own lack of religious faith or involvement back in the UK, was keen to persuade me that irrespective of being 'religious', faith had tremendous curative power which shouldn't be dismissed. In the case of a relative's illness, faith in God could potentially enable a recovery even for someone who *wasn't* religious. 'Let's be honest' (*hay que ser honesto*), he stated, 'religion is an organisation. The whole point of religion is to be organised.' The idea was clearly something Wilber had contemplated at length. A few days previously in a 'Little Community' (*Pequeña Comunidad*) bible-reading group's discussion, participants were discussing the week's prescribed verse. It was the day of the Feast of Corpus Christi, and the reading had concerned the Last

Supper, with participants encouraged to consider whether they themselves were in any way akin to Judas. Discussions, however, centred on the notion of the church as an ‘association’, and Wilber had commented positively that for him, the church was most fundamentally a social organisation, and that involvement with the church primarily meant to ‘live organised’ (*vivir organizado*).

Wilber’s phrasing in his later commentary, however—*hay que ser honesto*—appears to be somewhat critical, expressing a degree of cynicism. His comment implied a distinction between the elevated spiritual value of faith (*fe*) and its potencies, and the distinct kinds of value emerging from the comparatively somewhat debased, pragmatically-material prospects of being organised. Just because I had no need for the church as an organisation, he argued, didn’t mean I had to renounce the benefits of faith. Wilber articulated a comparable sense of critical distance when, on another occasion, he spoke about the activities of the local *Eclesiales de Base* liberation theology group. That group wasn’t *really* a religious group, he insisted. In fact, it was more like an NGO (*un organismo*). People only got involved with the group, he claimed, because of the prospect it offered of providing their children with scholarships (*becas*). And he began to list most of the local participants in the group, arguing that in each case children of members had been given secondary school scholarships because of their involvement with the organisation.

It was certainly the case that Wilber’s perception of the *Eclesiales de Base* as operating along the lines of an *organismo* was widely shared, but this overlap was generally evaluated positively. Indeed, participants in the group themselves frequently described its value in precisely these terms, noting in particular the activities of the group’s regional leader, Camila; a Spanish immigrant who had been resident in Nicaragua since the revolution, and who had cultivated flows of financial support for development projects from international church organisations, enabling ‘projects’ such as the scholarships which gained such local attention. During the

period of research, for example, members of the Gualiqueme *Eclesiales de Base* group succeeded in performing a *gestión* with Camila in order to secure a loan intended to fund a coffee-shrub nursery, hoping to make a profit given an anticipated rise in demand for new coffee plants in the wake of the rust epidemic (see Chapter 2). Comparable instances of funding for local projects had accompanied the



Figure 27— Residents of Gualiqueme and nearby villages participate in a regional *Ecclesiales de Base* meeting.

group's activities over the years. And just as NGO projects typically required participants to undertake educational workshops of different kinds, so members of the *Ecclesiales de Base* group regularly attended study groups and workshops in addition to their Sunday celebrations.

While the *Ecclesiales de Base*'s activities most closely mirrored that of *organismos*, participants in each of the village's religious groups occasionally relied for material assistance on the forms of solicitation discussed in Chapter 6. The Catholic chapel (*ermita*) had in recent years been renovated thanks to a financial contribution from the mayor's office, and this was described as having come as the

consequence of a successful *gestión* by local church members. Members of Evangelical groups spoke similarly of having undertaken *gestiones* with the mayor in order to request funding for a keyboard, for chairs and the costs of building the *templos*. Pastors were described as themselves conducting comparable *gestiones* with senior members of their respective Pentecostal denominations, whose far-flung connections with US groups were perceived to be—and very occasionally actually proved to be—potential sources of financial contributions towards the daily expenses of church activity.

These institutional overlaps and ambiguities, then, doubtless underpinned to an extent the discursive slippages between religious practices and the activities of ‘being organised’ discussed above. But I would suggest that fully accounting for the mutual resonance between these domains for Gualiqueme residents requires examining the extent to which each draws upon comparable models of social efficacy, and indeed, that pertinent dilemmas of productivity and power can be viewed as informing key practices in either field of involvement. In order to develop this point, I proceed now to describe and analyse the distinctive Nicaraguan Catholic tradition of *La Purísima*. By evaluating the ways in which this ritual can be seen to stand as in part a negotiation of key problematics of productivity encountered in the thesis thus far, through comparison with themes explored in previous chapters, I aim to show that an analysis of the *Purísima* ritual can generate insight into the structure of political hope (Jansen, 2014; Miyazaki, 2006) prevailing among Gualiqueme residents, and the particular form tensions tend to take when that hope is frustrated.

December 7th—*La gritería*

It is important to distinguish between the national festival of *La Purísima* of which the key tradition of *la gritería* is a central part, and local *Purísimas* held throughout December by individual households. On the one hand, *La Purísima* refers to a national festival held over the course of ten days in celebration of the immaculate

conception of the Virgin Mary. *La gritería*, an event considered to be unique to Nicaragua and held on the evening of December 7th, stands as the culmination of the nine days of devotional preparation (known as a *novena*) held prior to that date. Scholars partly trace the tradition in Nicaragua back to a papal bull pronounced in 1854, which established the sinless conception of Mary as a matter of Catholic orthodoxy (Ekern, 1995; Regidor, 2013). On the evening of December 7th, throughout the towns and villages of Nicaragua, households invite visitors to come and participate in a distinctive ceremony. They have prepared for the celebration in advance by building a small shrine to Mary in their living room or an available space in their house, and the ceremony involves singing songs in her praise. At exactly 6pm, an event known as *la gritería*—the shouting—takes place, where devotees respond to a conventional call, *quién causa tanta alegría?* (who causes so much joy), with a standard response; *la concepción de María!* (the conception of Mary). Then, visitors to the *Purísimas* are invited inside, packed into the hosts' houses, often on rows of plastic seating, or on roughly assembled benches. After having sung a few devotional songs in praise of Mary, and having participated in a few prayers led by their hosts, they are each provided with a small gift (known as a *gorra*).¹²³ This might comprise consumables such as a small bag of sweets, a piece or two of fruit, especially oranges (which are in season in December), or *ayote con miel*, (which is pumpkin stewed in cane syrup). Especially in urban areas, gifts might also comprise plastic kitchenware or other minor household items. Generally they are items that can easily be purchased relatively cheaply in large quantities. Once this distribution is complete and all visitors have received their gifts, the guests will leave the house and proceed to find another *Purísima*, continuing until they are either too tired or they've run out of available hosts.

¹²³ It is of note that the noun *gorra* can be used to mean 'freebie', and that the related verb *gorrear* is best translated as 'to scrounge'. Any negative evaluation connoted by *gorrear* is clearly absent in this use of the term in *Purísima* celebrations, however.

It is worth emphasising the sometimes intensely visceral experience of involvement with these ceremonies. To give an example, on the occasion that I participated in the festivities in the town of Condega, Paulita had invited me to join her and her son as they toured the available *Purísimas*. Her excitement was palpable as we waited, slightly before 6pm, in the ever-increasing crowd that was milling around outside the house of one of the host families. Closed off with a large iron gate, the house remained inaccessible—family members of the hosts occasionally peeked through the bars to gauge the size of the waiting congregation—and on each occasion the crowd heaved closer to the door, everyone hoping to be among the first group allowed in. Once six o'clock passed with a deafening volley of firecrackers and the traditional shouting of *la gritería*, the hosts unlocked and opened the gates. The crowd, forty or fifty strong, immediately surged, squeezing towards the entrance, jamming tight into the doorway. Gradually, people squeezed through, found themselves somewhere to sit, stand or perch in the decorated front room, and, once the hosts deemed that capacity had been reached, the iron gate was closed and locked shut once again, with the rest of the crowd consigned to wait for twenty minutes or so, until the next round of guests was admitted. After the singing had been completed in front of the shrine, participants were given a plastic wash bowl, an orange, a small bag of sweets, and immediately filed out of the house's side gate, and continued on to the next host house.

Local Purísimas

That, briefly, is the national festival of *la gritería*. But households also host individual *Purísimas* throughout the month of December, not necessarily held on any particular day. These events take a comparable ritual form, but because there are fewer celebrations occurring at the same time—in all likelihood no more than one in any given village in rural areas—participants in such events don't immediately rush from one to another. Rather, they are rather more extended affairs, involving lengthier

prayer sessions, more songs, and sometimes incorporating a service in the local church. In Gualiqueme and nearby villages it was considered typical for there to be up to four or five *Purísimas* held annually. And in this region, there wasn't necessarily quite such a disparity in wealth between hosts and visiting participants as was implied by the description of an urban *Purísima* I just provided, with those



Figure 28—Members of the host household distribute oranges during a *Purísima*. The decorated altar is visible on the left.

heavy, locking security gates. To be sure, the poorest households wouldn't consider holding *Purísimas*. But villagers do not look upon those that do as standing significantly above the economic norm. The gifts which stand as a central part of the proceedings are generally modest, typically comprising just a few sweets, *ayote con miel*, and perhaps a banana or two, though more lavish distributions are not unknown; one *Purísima* I attended near Gualiqueme gave out plastic children's toys along with the standard items.

These events, as with *Purísimas* held as part of the national festival, are hosted for a specific devotional purpose, almost always as part of a *promesa*—i.e., a religious

vow—undertaken with the Virgin Mary. As such, the distributive ceremony that comprises the heart of the *Purísima* becomes congruous with, and can be understood as being placed in a position of equivalence to, other forms of fulfilling such vows. Typically, a *promesa* might involve committing to undertake some devotional act; for example, to visit a particular shrine of a saint and leave an offering in exchange for assistance, say, in locating a lost animal. Perhaps the most striking form of fulfilling *promesas* can be seen in acts of rather extreme devotional self-sacrifice undertaken in repayment for a fulfilled vow. Acts such as performing a lengthy pilgrimage to a shrine crawling only on the knees appear to capture in exaggerated form the way in which sacrifice and a degree of personal expense, or even suffering, is understood as the most appropriate repayment for a solicitation for assistance that has been fulfilled. Incurring the cost of hosting a *Purísima* is structurally positioned, then, as a comparable act of devotional sacrifice. While lost animals are perhaps the most frequent theme of petitions to lesser saints, in the case of *Purísimas*, the associated *promesas* very frequently have to do with the illness of a relative, with Mary understood to be particularly apt at interceding to save the otherwise incurably or even terminally ill.

Existing accounts of *Purísima* rituals take a number of distinct analytical approaches. Roger Lancaster's (1988, 1992) work evaluates the tradition as one among a range of folk Catholic practices which operate as levelling mechanisms. He analyses *Purísimas* in reference to classic accounts in the ethnography of Central America which argue that institutionalised envy operates to functionally dissipate economic accumulation—through Catholic ritual, cargo systems, and quotidian practices of exchange—with fear of pathogenic envy positioned as the psychological force compelling compliance with the expense of participation in these practices (i.e., drawing upon Foster, 1965, 1979; Wolf, 1986). While some scholars have affirmed Lancaster's functionalist reading (Stanford, 2008), others insist that it is more appropriate to evaluate the ritual in terms of the gender symbolism it reproduces. It

has been argued that this performance of Marian devotion stands as part of a broad 'cult of motherhood' prevailing in Nicaragua and across Latin America (Ekern, 1995). Others insist that the tradition serves to reinforce rigidly traditional gender roles (Linkogle, 1998). And as observed by Linkogle, within Nicaragua itself the ritual is almost invariably described as being a valuable symbol of national identity and unity (cf., e.g., Regidor, 2013), although these imputed qualities have been refracted through the polarised discursive atmosphere prevailing among political elites, and contested readings of the tradition's political implications have been argued to play in to divergent nation-building projects (Stanford, 2008). Of greatest relevance for the account here, perhaps, are the numerous observations appearing in the literature of ways in which political practice in Nicaragua has consciously reproduced themes of the *Purísima*. It is observed that reverence of female purity central to the ritual's imagery has been deployed as a political trope both by the Sandinistas in their celebration of Daniel Ortega's mother as a foundational 'mother of heroes and martyrs' (Ekern, 1995), and by their political opponents, most notably in the aesthetic adopted by Violeta de Chamorro during the presidential campaign which ousted the FSLN in 1990 (Kampwirth, 2010b, p167). And Zimmerman (2000, p84) observes that student supporters of the FSLN prior to the revolution adapted the traditional chant of *Purísima* celebrations during protests of solidarity for Carlos Fonseca, when the FSLN founder was in captivity. In response to the call of "What is it that brings us such delight?", they substituted "Carlos Fonseca and his guerrilla fight", for the traditional "the conception of the Virgin Mary" (quoted in Stanford, 2008).

The analysis I present below, however, emerges out of the comparison I construct between resonant aspects of the *Purísima* ritual and the ethnography presented in the thesis prior to this point. I do not, therefore, attempt to offer a comprehensive account of the tradition's institutional or doctrinal history, or a full account of its symbolism; tasks which the existing literature adequately performs (Ekern, 1995; Linkogle, 1998; Stanford, 2008). I intend to undertake a brief



Figure 29—A *gorra* is received during a local *Purísima* celebration. Every visitor in attendance will receive a gift.

comparative analysis of this ritual, exploring its key structures and thematic components in relation to my account of rural Nicaraguan theories of efficacy. It is hoped that this drawing of connections and contrasts—bringing distinct domains into conversation with each other—will work to mutually illuminate either party to the comparison, while simultaneously serving to enable a synthetic presentation of the account of local theories of efficacy and productivity developed across the thesis. It has been made clear by the above examples that this conversation between domains is one already taking place on a continual basis through the quotidian

comparisons deployed by residents of Gualiqueme. The aim here, then, is to build on that evident resonance, extending the comparison in the light of my own analytical interests. My discussion will focus on a number of key thematic points; problems of distance and separation, dynamics of solicitation and assistance, the role of material flows and distributions, and notions of sacrifice and struggle.

Problems of distance and separation

The *Purísima* ritual has at its heart an effort to establish—or, rather, maintain and further cultivate—a relation of involvement between devotees and the Virgin Mary. There is, no doubt, a notion of reciprocity informing this effort; devotion and participation in the practicalities of the ceremony is viewed as constituting an exchange, such that adoration of the Virgin is capable of eliciting an attitude of protective benevolence from the saint, and particular acts of intercession might be secured. Indeed, as with the various forms of religious vow (*promesa*) undertaken by Catholics, *Purísima* festivities are generally held in order to fulfil a reciprocal commitment entered into with the Virgin at an earlier point in time. While the reasons for seeking the intervention of the Virgin in personal dilemmas and difficulties varies, it is predominantly intractable problems such as those posed by ill health, agricultural harvests or financial fortune which comprise the principal focus; in other words, arenas of activity within which humans action alone is considered incapable of significant influence (Hagene, 2006, 2008).

Consideration of this dynamic in relation to the discussions of previous chapters suggests that we examine the notions of power implicit here, along with resultant stipulations regarding the prospect of action. The capacity for intervention represented by the Virgin is assumed to be a spiritual power, the operation of which upon the material world is something of a mystery. This inscrutability, involving a needed potency known primarily by its effects, situates power as distant, and casts the possibility of efficacy as largely a problem of access, solicitation, and adequate

communication. The possibility of properly establishing a relation of involvement and mutuality with the saint becomes one of overcoming the distance between the world of humans and the spiritual world of the saints. Various elements of the ritual can be viewed as oriented towards this end, but in particular the collective shouting integral to *'la gritería'*, the singing which comprises a central part of the ceremony and the ample use of firecrackers play on this notion of an attempt to establish communication across intractable distance. Riotous and effervescent noise of these kinds, as has been observed by many commentators, is integral to the ceremony; and is a central requirement for the ritual to be considered effective (Ekern, 1995; Linkogle, 1998).

Stated in this way, parallels with a number of the distinct domains of social and political life discussed in previous chapters stand out. Chapter 2 explored the ways in which local historicity (Hirsch and Stewart, 2005) can be viewed as inflected by an emphasis on the role of transformative provision in the creation of the community. It was observed that constructions of revolutionary subjectivity as being radically separate from an indigenous past—though at times remaining somewhat ambiguous—stood as a key way in which the prospect of a crucial relation of involvement, care and support with the Sandinista state was asserted. By tapping into ethnic discourses to construe the very selves of residents as having been transformed by the same source of power that enabled the community to come into existence and to develop infrastructurally, Gualiqueme residents were seen to argue for the existence of a fundamental affiliation between themselves and state power, rooted in the assumption that assistance underpinned historical and ethical developmental progressions. There too, then, we saw Gualiqueme residents positing crucial powers as lying at a remove, and the prospect of viable life was viewed as contingent upon adequately obviating or mediating that distance.

Negotiation of distances and separations was also encountered in the account of domesticity provided in Chapter 5, although in a rather different way. There,

conjugal ties along with other household relations were seen to be bound up with the problem of how to contain and harness productive potentials distinguished and divided by gender, capacities viewed as both crucial, and as being fundamentally volatile and liable to excess. Those categorical distances needed to be negotiated, and volatilities overcome, for the successful realisation of domestic productivity.

And clearly, our exploration of the significance attributed to the act of local leaders undertaking *gestiones* revolves around comparable ideas regarding the need to access powers and possibilities which stand separate and distant from the community. *Gestionando* was presented in Chapter 6 as operating precisely to facilitate the mediation of political separations, through positing notions of productivity rooted in the struggling, labouring body as a key operator in facilitating vital flows of material support. The central role of these material flows will be examined in more detail shortly, but it can be noted here that in each of these domains, the possibility of viable action has been assumed to revolve around the resolution of a fundamental distance. Rather than a capacity for volitional action founded in the individual, then, efficacy across these contexts has been construed to depend upon an act of bridging, the performance of mediation, and the cultivation of vital involvement with distant potentials.

Taking note of these structural parallels between *Purísimas* and other efforts to mediate distance, moreover, allows us to gain a clearer sense of why notions of struggle might hold such a central place in the dynamics described in preceding chapters. It has already been observed that in relation to *promesas* entered into with the Virgin, undertaking the expense of holding a *Purísima* assumes the place ordinarily held by self-sacrificial devotional undertakings. Considering this in relation to the themes of previous chapters, we might note that undertaking the expense of hosting a *Purísima*, accumulating the collection of gifts whose distribution enables the ritual to take place, can thus be seen to play a comparable role to notions of struggle in relation to efforts to establish entitlements to land, or

the properties attributed to 'movement' deployed in discourse of 'being organised'. In each case, the implied assertion is that sacrificial expenditure—of personal *fuerza* or of money—is the most practicable method of eliciting a response from relevant sources of power. In this model of efficacy, struggle assumes a sacrificial capacity to obviate distance such that recruitment of distant forms of power becomes viable. The emphasis upon personal effort—as with the expense of holding a *Purísima*—thus becomes not primarily an assertion of autonomy or a demonstration of independence, but rather a practical method of attempting to grapple with and gain influence over external power.

Material flows

With crucial capacities and powers posited to underwrite viable action assumed to stand at a remove, then, efforts to mediate distance and attain to forms of participation in distant power becomes a central concern. Both in *La Purísima* and in the domains explored in previous chapters, material flows play an integral role in this dynamic. In the case of *Purísima* celebrations, material distributions are taken to secure the necessary collectivity required for ritual efficacy, for adequately performing devotion to, and gaining the attentions of the saint. It can be observed that a number of crucial practical considerations inform the choice of gifts employed for this purpose, but these practical considerations can be seen to be ritually significant. The items chosen are always small, and easily divisible; they are gathered in abundance in preparation for the event and, indeed, the celebration will usually be over-prepared for such that inclusion is guaranteed, and the possibility of participation can be readily extended to all who arrive. This universality is an integral part of the ritual. Everyone who attends will receive their *gorra*, and a *Purísima* in which the gifts prepared for distribution don't turn out to be sufficient to involve everyone is simply unheard of; precisely because the kinds of item chosen can always be further divided and subdivided if necessary, depending on actual attendance. This

insistence upon universality, along with the notion that material distribution can serve to obviate the distances which stand as obstacles to efficacy, invites both comparison and contrast to themes explored previously.

As already mentioned, one notable path of interpretation in the literature on *Purísima* celebrations is to view them—drawing on the classic literature of peasant communities in Central America—as operating functionally as ‘levelling mechanisms’ (Foster, 1965, 1979; Lancaster, 1988, 1992; Stanford, 2008). This line of analysis posits that ritual distributions with forms comparable to *La Purísima* are impelled by the imperative to avoid appearing to accumulate, given the dangers attributed to envy; and works from the assumption that these injunctions are underwritten by the broad economic model of ‘limited good’ thinking; the notion that any individual’s accumulation necessarily takes away from potential prosperity available to others. Such analyses, then, argue that rural ideology works from the *a priori* assumption that goods come in limited supply, irrespective of the extent to which they actually do.

However, considering the way material distributions are recruited to perform the work of securing the obviation of distance required for efficacy—as described above—suggests a contrasting interpretation. We have seen how ritual distributions are conducted in the light of an imperative of inclusion; universal receipt of a *gorra* is assumed to be crucial and is ensured. All who attend a *Purísima*, hosts and guests, benefactors and beneficiaries, givers and receivers, are understood to be devotionally involved. These ritual elements present an interesting parallel with the way political distributions have been handled by Gualiqueme residents. Indeed, it has already been observed that cooperative leaders in Gualiqueme appear to have attempted to perform an act of subdivision—comparable, perhaps, to the fragmentation of *gorras* which allow universality to be realised in *Purísimas*—when administering distributions of *Plan Techo* in Gualiqueme. Though the project was officially intended to involve distributing ten roof panels per beneficiary to the most

economically needy individuals, cooperative leaders made the decision—in response to intensive petitioning and personalised *gestiones* from villagers—to further subdivide the allocation, allocating five panels each to twice the number of recipients. Speaking of *Plan Techo*, Gualiqueme residents, though occasionally nodding to the theory of needs-based allocation, much more frequently articulated the notion that it was simply something that ‘everyone’ should receive. Considering this in the light of our analysis of the material component of *Purísima* ritual, we might suggest that since what matters most is the way participating in material flows potentially works to facilitate involvement in distant sources of power—and in the case of these state projects which are discursively wedded to Ortega, involvement in the central source of transcendental ‘help’ represented by the president himself—the possibility of standing as a beneficiary has come to be invested with the prospect of performing the kinds of mediation required to properly bridge this fundamental political distance inhering between Ortega and Gualiqueme residents.

And it is here that analyses based upon Foster’s classic theory of limited good thinking appear to founder. For the dynamic we have witnessed in previous chapters appears to overwhelmingly be one in which tensions emerge from the fact that the material flows accorded the potential to establish crucial relations of involvement with distant sources of power, and most particularly the personalised presidential power of Ortega, *really are* limited. Though rural Sandinistas may invest these projects with the performative role of the *gorra*, the material components of state social programs resist this ritual function to different degrees. *Plan Techo*—with its distributions of roofing panels which have been able to be further subdivided—is perhaps the project most amenable to this role, and thus stands as the project whose material component stands in closest comparability to the choice of material tokens selected in *Purísima* celebrations; divisible, available in great quantity, potentially expandable to further facilitate inclusion. The amenability of *Plan Techo* to this performative role, it might be suggested, accounts in part for the extent to which this

project has come to hold such a central place in subaltern political imaginaries across Nicaragua.¹²⁴ But most such programs, and *Plan Techo* too, resist this role through their inherent participatory limitations. The material components of *Hambre Cero*, for example, with participation necessarily limited to just ten or so beneficiaries per community, is far from affording any possibility of universal distributive inclusion; subdivision and inclusive extension are not possibilities. To the extent that these distributive projects are performatively accorded the imaginative function of facilitating an envisaged universalist participation in presidential power, we might surmise, and to the degree to which their material affordances *resist* that imperative—in other words, the extent to which they stand as very literally limited goods—the political hopes invested in them are likely to be frustrated. Rather than potentially universal goods assumed to be limited, this dynamic appears to be one of genuinely limited goods assumed to be potentially universal. In this light, the tensions described in the previous chapter show up as efforts to resolve these ritual difficulties, with idioms of envy serving to account for divergence from envisaged universality.

Assistance and struggle

Setting the material components of Sandinista distributive projects alongside the distributive acts integral to *Purísima* rituals allows us to perceive a model of efficacy which runs through and informs both. Acts of material distribution, though in distinct ways in different domains, come to be invested with the capacity to obviate the separations inhering between the distinct and differing actors whose mutual participation must be achieved for viable action to be realised. The mediatory capacities attributed to the act of struggle animates these stipulations, and the

¹²⁴ Colburn and Cruz (2012, p115) cite survey data which indicates the extent of this impact: ‘An October 2011 survey revealed that the most appreciated government program or service offered by Ortega’s administration was the “Roof Plan” (*Plan Techo*), with 37 percent of respondents mentioning it.’

properties material flows gain in this context emerge, as we have seen, from the ways they tap into and resonate with a logic of sacrificial solicitation. We saw in Chapter 7 for example, how members of the Telpaneca group, understanding this crucial mediation to be obstructed by envious intervention, turned immediately to a discursive emphasis of their own suffering during the war. For members of that group, their own sufferings, invested with a sacrificial capacity to elicit assistance (cf., Mayblin, 2010, p92), *should* have guaranteed a relation of fundamental ‘help’ with presidential power; and the smooth flow of projects such as *Plan Techo* would have indicated a successful mediation of political distance. With the benefits of projects not forthcoming, envious action was inferred as the most plausible culprit, given that all the other ingredients of this mode of political mediation were in place.

We saw in Chapter 1, through an exploration of the work of Gudeman and Rivera, and Mayblin, that across rural Latin America, vital flows of *fuerza*—mediating the distance between divinity and mankind—are understood to be crucial to sustain productive life, and that the struggle of labour and the experience of suffering is construed in key contexts as facilitating and enabling this fundamental mediation. The political imaginary prevailing among Gualiqueme residents, it has been seen, can best be understood as an iteration of this model, one which has taken its particular form in relation to the specific political history of the country and their community, and in relation to the current political and institutional context impinging on their lives. The Sandinista revolution inaugurated for Gualiqueme residents the compelling promise of a ready relation of assistance with the centres of state power, and an ideology of ‘help’ traditionally oriented towards local power holders appeared amenable to extension even to the president. Concrete improvements in infrastructure, health and education for rural people are attributed to moments in which this key relation of assistance has been properly realised. Moreover, the turmoil brought in the wake of the revolution with the civil war has, regrettably, provided an ample experiential point of reference for the generative

properties attributed to struggle and suffering to be extensively deployed, in efforts to ensure the continued viability of this relation.

The thesis has shown that the ongoing tensions and everyday difficulties of village life for Gualiqueme residents have largely played out with this key political imaginary as a point of reference. Local constructions of history were seen to take shape in relation to key components of this vision of political life. Amid the complex confusions of the land tenure situation in post-revolutionary Nicaragua, the dynamic of personal struggle and external, allocative power was shown to run through efforts to realise entitlements to land within the Gualiqueme cooperative. And the prospect of realising and securing entitlements to the broader forms of assistance understood to be potentially available through the wide range of NGO and state development and welfare projects active in rural Nicaragua has similarly been seen to raise for Gualiqueme residents the question of how best to mediate political distance. The active 'movement' of intensive solicitation was seen in Chapter 6 to offer one plausible solution, and we have just seen how the suffering of living through the war was construed as potentially capable of eliciting an involvement with state power through play upon Catholic sacrificial logic. These varying efforts to realise the transformative potentials attributed to state power have been seen to have crucial structural correlates in relation to prevailing stipulations regarding domestic productivity. In either field of social action, the possibility of efficacy emerges not from a purely internal capacity, but depends upon mediating distance and attaining to states of mutuality and incorporation which span that separation. And in relation to both domesticity and envisaged involvements with state power, we have seen how experienced forms of vulnerability and social volatility for rural Nicaraguans follow the contours of these assumptions regarding what is required for productive life. The difficulties of life as lived by Gualiqueme residents, and relatedly, the envisaged prospects of overcoming those difficulties, have been seen to be intimately related to

the ways in which needed mediations are locally perceived to be resisted in one way or another.

Epilogue: Encompassment, agency and the politics of distance

This thesis opened with a brief account of what could very well be described as a political pilgrimage, with Gualiqueme residents undertaking a lengthy journey in order to catch the briefest glimpse of president Ortega, or ‘the boss himself’ (*el mero jefe*), as he was often called. The sense of political possibility as depending upon the broaching and mediation of distances which was conveyed by that ambiguously-fruitful, somewhat arduous journey has been a theme which ran through the analysis of the preceding chapters. Just as the effortful undertaking of a long day’s travel appeared to offer the prospect of forging some kind of valued connection with a distant source of transformative political potential, in the form of presidential power—albeit in that instance an undertaking rewarded with a mere glimpse—so *efforts* and struggles of various kinds have been seen to be construed as integral to the work of mediating distance involved in forms of domestic, social, political and religious efficacy which cut across Gualiqueme life.

I would like to end the discussion of the thesis by briefly considering the analytical perspective I have adopted in relation to a number of broad approaches within anthropology in recent decades. My exploration of how efficacy and productivity is understood among rural Nicaraguans, and how this plays into local engagements with encompassing institutional contexts, has explored the productive possibilities imputed to *distances* of different kinds. As such, it might be viewed, I suggest, as making a contribution to a set of recent studies of diverse regional provenance which have the potential to comprise a comparative ethnography of what I will term the politics of distance. As I will show presently, across a number of distinct ethnographic contexts, scholars have been concerned to describe and account for indigenous political imaginaries which, in different ways, place a central emphasis upon the ways in which distance and exteriority underwrite or are

foundational to political possibility. As a comparative project, however, this analytical concern remains underdeveloped, and in this brief epilogue I wish to make the case that there would be fertile analytical prospects opened up by dialogue between the several fields of discussion in which this concern has arisen.

However, it is also the case that these works can be seen to both be crucially related to, but also frequently to stand in implicit or explicit analytical tension with, two other key currents of recent anthropological analysis. The first such line of thought is represented by the well-established concern to understand the ways in which constituencies studied by anthropologists—some of which were once imagined by analysts to be discrete, bounded communities, or societies unto themselves—are in fact encompassed by trans-local political and economic structures and processes. The second analytical concern, which to an extent emerged as a response to those efforts, are the broad range of studies which focus upon ‘agency’, and aim to understand how autonomy and a subaltern capacity to shape social outcomes can emerge in scenarios of political encompassment and putative domination or hierarchy. A primary concern to explicate indigenous political understandings shows up as problematic in the light of the assumptions underpinning either of these two broad analytical schools of thought, and I consider that a future comparative project aiming to unpack the diverse framings of the productive possibilities attributed to distance and exteriority needs to better grapple with the problems presented by these divergent intellectual currents. I aim here simply to identify that tension, and to indicate the terrain I view a comparative ethnography of the politics of distance to have the potential to occupy.

Political encompassment

I will first, then, provide an account of the two broad trends that I consider ethnographies of the politics of distance to stand in a degree of tension with, and briefly sketch the theoretical divergence producing that tension. That powers lying

beyond or standing external to a community might be of crucial importance of course informs a key reformulation of the anthropological project, but one operating primarily in relation to analytic rather than ethnographic concerns. The shift from viewing the traditional non-Western communities of anthropological study as comprising discrete, bounded societies, to describing the ways in which such peoples had long been immersed in trans-local political and social ties—not least those ties established by processes of colonialism and the forms of political domination accompanying it—revolutionised anthropological analysis. Ethnographies of peasant societies hold a particular place in relation to the debates emerging from this shift, owing to the fact the category of the peasant was from the start theorised as integrally encompassed by broader political forms (Kearney, 1996; Shanin, 1987). Indeed, studies of peasantries came to be considered of relevance for anthropology at the same moment that indigenous groups once referred to as ‘primitive’ came to be viewed as having always already been bound up with encompassing political and economic structures (Wolf, 1982).

While what I am terming the ethnography of the politics of distance is primarily concerned to comprehend indigenous understandings of the role of exteriority in political power and potential, these studies focus on political encompassment but with an eye primarily towards developing an authoritative historical or analytic account of encompassing processes and structures themselves. As such, they can at times come into analytical conflict with ethnographic observations of specific local understandings of power and politics; when local understandings of politics appear to contradict or stand in conceptual tension with the depictions constructed by the analyst in studies of this type, the former tends to be relegated to the status of an inadequate representation of the reality captured in the latter. This tendency has, of course, been most explicitly addressed—indeed, analytically embraced—in the tradition of Marxian analysis, through deployment of the notions of ‘false consciousness’ and ‘ideology’. But much anthropological work

has gone into the challenge of retaining an authoritative view of encompassing structures without submitting to this kind of wholesale epistemological devaluation of indigenous perspectives (e.g., Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991, 2001).

Agency

Accounts of political encompassment stood as one among a number of trends which led to the explosion of interest in the concept of ‘agency’. With studies depicting the determinative role of encompassing political forms taking centre stage in anthropology, and with associated concepts of domination and power accorded primary analytic value, scholars increasingly came to be dissatisfied with the implications of prevailing theoretical trends for understandings of the political freedom, social efficacy and autonomy of their research subjects. Working to supplement accounts which focused upon the determinative role of encompassing structures—be they political or normative—theoretical attention to agency aimed to counterbalance any implication of rigidity, failure to accommodate the possibility of change over time, and perceived misrepresentations in relation to the creativity and complexity of human life produced by these models.

Indeed, much theoretical work was expended on the effort to think through the imputed conflicts and practical resolutions emerging between these putatively opposed processes of structure and agency, leading to theoretical artefacts such as Giddens’ (1986) notion of ‘structuration’, and Sahlins’ (1987) concept of the ‘structure of the conjuncture’. Bourdieu’s (1977) theories of practice stands as another paradigmatic effort to reconcile the apparently improvised, intuitive and spontaneous nature of human action with a sense of social order as depending upon systematic reproduction. As Mahmood points out (2011), ‘agency’, in the light of these debates, came to be understood as present to the degree that encompassing structures, political, economic or normative, were shifted, reworked or refused by social actors.

This led to a particular view of political life, one in which individual or local agency showed up, or became analytically visible, to the extent that it could be viewed as standing in opposition to encompassing forms of normative, conceptual or political authority. In the field of peasant studies this primarily took the form of efforts to theorise the ways in which rural ‘resistance’ to the domination of elites, or to their incorporation into trans-local, national and international political and economic structures, materialised in daily practice. Scott’s (1985) theorisation of the way ‘weapons of the weak’ served to undermine and counteract domination through ‘foot-dragging’ and other apparently minor acts of non-compliance is perhaps the most influential such study, revolving around the opposition between encompassing structures of authority and local autonomy, i.e., ‘agency’.

In generating an analytically-deduced social dynamic which is assumed to operate independently of the political understandings held to by actors themselves, these theorisations of the role of agency stand in similar tension with efforts to ethnographically document the specificity of indigenous political imaginaries and the values they produce. Mahmood’s critique of agency is just one example of the way prioritising the validity of the models articulated by informants themselves may lead to a critique of analytical models, such as those surrounding the concept of ‘agency’, which fail to adequately accommodate what Viveiros de Castro (2003, no pagination) referred to as ‘the conceptual self-determination of all the planet’s minorities’. The same author’s critique of the use of authoritative analytic models whose dynamics are already known by the anthropologist prior to the research process captures this dissatisfaction; ‘[the anthropologist] knows much too much about the native before the game even starts; she predefines and circumscribes the possible worlds expressed by this other’ (n.p.).

Comparative ethnographies of the politics of distance

Contrary to any implication of Viveiros de Castro's critique that an appropriate course of action is to assume maximal ethnographic particularity, however, my suggestion is that a number of recent anthropological interventions, spanning a range of ethnographic contexts and a number of localised debates, comprise a coherent body of literature united by the concern to theorise the different ways *distance* of varying forms may be assumed to underpin political life. I deploy the general term 'distance' here in order to bring into a single purview analyses which grapple with indigenous notions of political alterity, and those which explore local emphasis upon imputed values and political potentials emerging from social separations integral to hierarchy, forms of gender differentiation or political stratification. This range of texts, I want to suggest, are also implicitly unified by both a prioritising of local conceptual forms, and by the consequent and distinctive ways in which their analyses stand in tension with the two broad theoretical trends of encompassment and agency just described. Though keenly concerned with the place of political encompassment and the way exteriority plays into political life, it is primarily the place of these properties in indigenous political imaginaries which comprises a central focus. And though directly interested in the contours of quotidian political action and efficacy, in common with the literature on agency, this prioritising of the conceptual underpinnings of indigenous political thought leads any universalist notion of autonomy or efficacy to be rejected in the light of diversely-observed insistences that power primarily lies at a remove, or depends in some way upon separation and distance. In what follows I do not aim to be comprehensive in reviewing this literature, but rather to briefly sketch some of its key shared concerns, and to outline possibilities for future development of this comparative anthropology of the politics of distance.

In a recent text of wide-ranging comparative scope, Marshall Sahlins (2008) analyses the figure of the 'stranger-king'. Found in political myths of diverse

historical and geographical provenance, this key idea that the sovereign is a foreigner originating from elsewhere, and that the political power they represent is crucially derived from that originary geographical and cultural distance, is viewed by Sahlins' as capturing a key component of political imaginaries which span a broad diversity of social orders. Comparing Indonesian stranger-kings, Fijian big men, Amazonian head-hunters, and making reference to understandings of the role of shamans and chiefs in societies across the globe, Sahlins argues that there is a common assumption underpinning the authority assumed to inhere in these figures of leadership; 'all achieve their differential authority by their instantiation or command of external sources of vitality and mortality' (p188).

His argument is that each of these formations revolves around notions of 'the potency of alterity' (p192), a political assumption frequently articulated in practice by means of kinship and marriage. Tapping into longstanding debates about descent and affinity as opposed principals of social organisation, and acknowledging that the argument is somewhat 'wild' in its generality, Sahlins develops the proposition 'that the social incorporation and distribution of external life powers is the elementary form of the political life, and that marital alliance is its experiential archetype. More especially, that the stranger-king polity is a developed expression of these principles, stranger-kings being to the native peoples as affinal relatives are to consanguines' (p184). The figure of the stranger-king, then, stands as an expression of the same principals of the crucial value of alterity which informs the key dynamics of kinship and marriage.

Now, Sahlins is primarily concerned here to formulate a synthetic analysis of this range of forms of political authority found in, as he (ironically) puts it in the article, 'traditional' societies. But in working to comparatively theorise the ways in which notions of 'life from without' (p179) structure political cosmologies, I take his text to be a key work among a number of studies which draw attention to ways in which distance underpins notions of political efficacy, potency and power.

This effort to theorise the value held to inhere in alterity itself, and to understand the way in which kinship practices comprise a central modality of the expression of this assumption of course comprises a key theme in Amazonianist ethnography; it is no surprise that the works of Descola, Viveiros de Castro, Fausto and others stand as central references in Sahlins' text. In this Amazonianist literature, a primary concern has been to comprehend the ways in which valued asymmetries are inhabited by those occupy the position which might conventionally be assumed to imply passivity, dependency or domination; for example, the position of the 'pet' in broadly-held notions of master-pet relations, and in ideas surrounding adoptive filiation. As Carlos Fausto (2008, no pagination) has shown, a consensus has emerged that what may at first appear a humbled position by no means implies passivity; 'From the perspective of whoever is adopted-captured, being or placing oneself in the position of an orphan or a wild pet is more than just a negative and inescapable injunction: it may also be [...] a positive way of eliciting attention and generosity'.

Fausto describes a perilous mediation with valued alterity as holding a central place in diverse Amazonian societies, in which vital but dangerous forms of otherness need to be appropriated for life to be viable; 'various Amazonian peoples not only conceive the world to be made of multiple domains, they are also conscious of the fact that, to live, humans are compelled to ignore their limits: planting, hunting and fishing require them to invade these alien spaces, almost always with predatory intentions' (n.p.). With the figure of the owner or master assumed to hold sovereignty over these needed domains of otherness, viable life comes to be assumed to depend upon establishing the right kinds of dependency upon, or subordinate involvement with, those outside powers.

Also relevant to the theme of constitutive distance in political imaginaries are works which focus on social separations and hierarchies. James Ferguson's (2013a, 2013b) work on the theme of 'dependency', to which I have already referred in

Chapter 1, is a key example here. He analyses ways in which South African populations appear to actively strive to negate the assumed equalities and identity of status taken for granted by liberal political thought. Though engaging with welfare programs theoretically intended to bring about this assumed inherent human equality, his informants were observed to strive to re-create valued forms of hierarchy. Proper social life was assumed to require relations of provision and support across marked status boundaries, and subaltern South Africans, as Ferguson put it, much preferred social incorporation on unequal terms to an asocial exclusion from such asymmetries (see also, Haynes, 2012, 2013).

A somewhat comparable perspective is developed by Saba Mahmood (2011), who takes explicit issue with the implications of the concept of ‘agency’ in her analysis of members of the women’s mosque movement in Egypt. Mahmood theorises the methods by which women work to cultivate pious selves in a way which works to avoid assuming *a priori* that the political freedom of her informants must necessarily emerge through a concern to ‘resist’ patriarchy. Through attending to the techniques of bodily comportment and personal discipline by which piety is attained, Mahmood documents the concerns of a population for whom the cultivation of a posture of submission to centres of power and authority outside themselves is a central value. In jointly taking issue with the notion of the ‘liberationary subject’ which underpins anthropological theories of agency, both Mahmood and Ferguson explicitly aim to take account of political imaginaries whose presuppositions stand at odds with any sense that the autonomous actor stands as the source of social causality, or that relevant political action is primarily that which works against or counteracts encompassing social or cultural forms and structures.

I conclude this brief review by making mention of Joel Robbins’ (2009) work among the Urapmin in Papua New Guinea, which analyses the appeal of Charismatic Christianity for the authors’ rural informants. Working from what he calls the ‘banal observation’ that for many forms of Christianity, ‘heaven is understood to be far

away from the earth, generally somewhere in the sky' (p55), Robbins makes a powerful case that part of the appeal of Charismatic Christianity for the Urapmin lies in the way its distinctive handling of crucial cosmological separations and distances chimes with their everyday politico-economic experiences. For the Urapmin, 'development' appears to hold the primary promise of economic advancement, and yet to originate from rather inscrutable and inaccessible centres of power. Robbins argues that with its insistence that heaven lies at a distant remove, but with its accompanying promise that this fundamental separation can be overcome by the work of the Holy Spirit, Charismatic Christianity offers an alternative vision of valued distance which they might actually be able to mediate.

Robbins understands this tendency to locate crucial sources of political power at a remove to be a product of globalisation itself: 'By rendering so many people in the world "off-centre" in their own lives, globalisation has produced a deep pool of experienced alterity, a feeling that the real powers in the world are different from those people have previously known and that they come from elsewhere' (p68). Sahlins' wide-ranging article discussed above—with its evidence of comparable structures of political thought with great historical and geographical breadth—might prompt us to temper this statement to an extent. But again, we see here that involvement with, participation in, and incorporation of distant, external or outside powers and sources of value is a central and abiding political concern. In each of these diverse ethnographic contexts, then, we are presented with peoples for whom political action is conceptualised as requiring the cultivation of an appropriate relation of involvement with exterior, outside or distant centres of power and authority. Despite this commonality, in each case highly specific, culturally-contingent assumptions are brought to bear on the question of how that constitutive distance stands amenable to be grappled with. A comparative ethnographic project would aim to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the distinctive ways in which different ethnographic constituencies formulate the particular possibilities

assumed to be available in the daily work of mediation aimed at tapping into or otherwise engaging with these potentials of political distance. For this proposed comparative project to progress theoretically, however, the tensions identified above—both with the literature on political encompassment and that which explores ‘agency’—will have to be acknowledged and engaged with.

If it is accepted that these diverse currents of ethnography contain the potential for a comparative ethnography of the politics of distance, then this thesis can be viewed as presenting one contribution to that future project. With political potential assumed to depend in key ways upon distance, the comparative question becomes how exactly that valued distance is locally assumed to be available; the models developed which offer means of obviating it, or the mechanics by which mediation might be achieved. The account I have provided of rural Nicaraguan understandings of efficacy can be considered as a presentation of one distinctive iteration—formulated in relation to certain key notions of personhood and power specific to the rural peasantries of Latin America—of the way in which the widely-perceived political value of distance and separation stands amenable to recruitment in daily practice.

For rural Nicaraguans, as we have seen, this is a dynamic that revolves around the central place accorded to forms of political assistance, and the ways in which valued acts of struggle are constituted as capable of realising a proper relation with those distant sources of ‘help’. But since this model takes for granted certain things—about persons and bodies, about the qualities of struggle and sacrifice, about the specific sources of political and social power and potential—then it can be expected that this particular way of attempting to tap into the values accruing to distance stands as a viable possibility only for those who share those assumptions. A comparative project would aim to adequately describe the full diversity of criteria deployed in different contexts in order to achieve this common, broadly-compelling political vision of the fundamental value of distance.

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